"CHILDREN OF THE CORN"

by

STEPHEN KING

REVISED: 6/80

AUDIO: VOICE/OVER

1968 was "the crazy year."
Johnson escalated the war in Viet Nam.
At the Chicago Convention, there was
a "police riot." The Byrds exhorted
their fans to get eight miles high.

In Gatlin, Nebraska, something went
wrong. Horribly, irrevocably wrong.
It happened quietly. It made no headlines.

That summer, He Who Walks Behind the Rows
came to Gatlin.

Twelve years later...

VISUAL: White titles on black.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX PRESENTS

STEPHEN KING'S "CHILDREN OF THE CORN"

STARRING _____ AND _____

PRODUCED BY JOE MASEFIELD

DIRECTED BY HARRY WILAND

Slow bleed dissolve to EXT. wide shot of two lane hard top.
(scene 1)

FADE IN:

1 EXT. TWO-LANE BLACKTOP DAY

HIGH ANGLE down a long stretch of HIGHWAY which runs straight as a string all the way to the far horizon. It is the only break in a green CORNFIELD that comes right up to the shoulders of the road on both sides. Overhead, a bright blue sky. Green corn, black road with a broken white dividing line. The road is utterly empty.

SOUND: A radio being dialed across the AM band — through heavy static. It pauses each time a station is received, then pushes on quickly.

RADIO
(A fragment of Tammy Wynette singing "Stand By Your Man")

(STATIC)

...and the West Hemingford Community Hospital reports the following admissions: Mr. Addison Crowley, with a broken leg; David Watson, who got bunged up a little when he fell off the scaffolding down there at Dorton's Hardware, seems like he fractured his collarbone; Mrs. David Miller, who—

(STATIC)

(Stock music and corn fertilizer commercial)

(STATIC)

MAN'S VOICE
Christ.

RADIO
...not mocked! No He isn't, my brothers 'n sisters! Now they'll tell you in New York and in Los Angeles and in Shytown that he's dead, but He ain't dead! He's waitin' and He's watchin', but He ain't dead. And when the stench of the sinnin' and the mockery of the Almighty reacheth up into Heaven, He's gonna smite the wicked, and the smell of the burning will fill the land, oh yeah! And the rock will not hide them! Neither will the dead tree give them shelter—

(STATIC)

1 CONTINUED 1

MAN'S VOICE
Hail Mary, fulla grace, help
me win this stockcar race.

A CAR approaches, moving fast. The sun is twinkling on the chrome and on the glass of the windshield.

RADIO
(Jerry Lee Lewis singing
"Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On")

MAN'S VOICE
Well, all right. Boogie.

The radio volume goes UP.

The CAR is roaring closer. In a few seconds it will pass beneath us and out of frame.

MAN'S VOICE
(singing with radio)
"Come on over, baby, we got
chicken in the barn—"

WOMAN'S VOICE
Turn it down!

The car, a Thunderbird, passes and we are looking at perfect emptiness again: the corn cut only by the thin black stripe of the road, the blue sky over all.

MAN'S VOICE
(wearily)
Yes, Vicky. Whatever you say.

The radio volume goes DOWN — continues — fading.

SOUND: Only the faint rustle of the WIND. Nothing more.

2 INT. THE THUNDERBIRD, W/BURT AND VICKY STANTON DAY

BURT is driving the Bird, this year's model, fast and well. He is handsome, about 35, casual attire — but so neatly turned out that he looks nearly military.

VICKY is sitting as far over in the passenger seat as she can get. A few years younger than Burt, she is beautiful,

2 (CONT'D) 2

with long hair tied back with a bright silk scarf and a dynamite body in a blue workshirt (open several buttons, no bra, nice tan) and jeans. Her face is lovely, but marred by a spoiled, pouty expression — a kind of bratty look that says Beware! Shoals Ahead!

Whatever their marital problems may be, it's clear that Burt is still very much physically attracted to her. As a result, there is a constant sexual tension between them.

The T-Bird's back seat is filled with an accumulation of vacation stuff — a suitcase with stickers on it, two smaller tote bags, a wicker birdcage.

BURT turns up the volume, enjoying the moment.

RADIO
("White Rabbit" by
Jefferson Airplane)

VICKY
Turn it down, Burt.

BURT is singing along with the chorus, tapping his fingers to the beat on the steering wheel. He breaks off and looks at VICKY.

BURT
What?

VICKY's patience breaks. She reaches over and snaps the radio off, furious with him in a sulky, little-girl way.

VICKY
I said turn it down!

BURT
Oh. Is that what you said.

VICKY
You play it loud like that just to get under my skin, don't you?

BURT
I play it loud because I like it loud. I like the oldies.

VICKY
Bullshit.

BURT
Too primitive for you?

2 (CONT'D) 2

VICKY
Oh, shut up!

BURT
All I said was—

VICKY
Just...be quiet.

She looks out the window, pauses, then speaks one word with utter loathing.

VICKY (CONT'D)
Nebraska.

BURT starts to speak — and thinks better of it. His face has taken on a wooden cast — the face of the Good Soldier who has gotten in back. VICKY continues to stare out the window. A familer silence between these two, awkward and angry.

3 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 3

PASSING between two endless banks of CORN. Under its passage we hear the mysterious, strangely ominous SOUND of *CORN RUSTLING.*

4 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD — FROM CORNFIELDS 4

Leaves and stalks fuzz the edges of the frame, almost claustrophobically.

5 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD — APPROACHING 5

Down the middle of the road toward camera. Abruptly the car slows and pulls off onto the shoulder. The door opens. BURT gets out.

6 INT. THUNDERBIRD 6

VICKY
What are you doing?

BURT
When you gotta go, you gotta go.

SOUND: A ZIPPER being run down.

VICKY closes her eyes, disgusted.

6 (CONT'D) 6

VICKY
Oh...my...God.
(pause)
What are you going to do
if someone comes, Burt?

BURT crosses in front of the car and down the shoulder.

BURT
I'm going into the corn,
don't worry. I won't get
hoisted for public exposure.
Rest your mind, Vicky.

VICKY watches him walk into the corn. For a moment we see his sport shirt through the heavy growth, and then he's gone.

SOUND: A faint splashing.

BURT
(satisfaction supreme)
Aaahhhhh!

VICKY looks utterly disgusted — and bored. She fiddles with the map, drops it. Looks out the window again. The splashing sound has stopped. Still no sign of Burt. She begins to look a bit uneasy.

VICKY
Burt...? Hey, Burt!

No answer. After a moment VICKY opens her door and gets out.

7 EXT. IN THE CORN - MOVING 7

CLOSE-UP on a BOY of about eleven, wearing a faded checked shirt and bluejeans and clutching a battered suitcase tied shut with clothesline, RUNNING furiously through the corn. He is absolutely terrified.

SOUND: The harsh gasp of his BREATHING.

He is covered with cornsilk and tattered fragments of green cornleaves. He looks back over his shoulder constantly, leaving a broken path of twisted cornstalks behind him.

8 NEAR THE THUNDERBIRD - WITH VICKY 8

Now she is definitely upset — and pissed off.

VICKY
Burt! Where are you? Quit the
game, it's not funny! Burt!

8 (CONT'D) 8

She glances nervously at the corn — deep, thick, impenetrable.

SOUND: A soft RUSTLING, almost like a whisper.

For a second we see an expression deeper than annoyance on her face. We see fear.

Unseen by Vicky, BURT pops out of the corn about twenty feet down from where he went in.

BURT
Boo!

VICKY's face registers a start...then freezes. She turns on her heel and goes back to the car without a word.

BURT approaches her side, looking a bit contrite. He tries to touch her.

BURT
Listen, babe, I didn't mean to spook you. Honest.

VICKY
(coldly)
Never mind. Just drive. It's hot. I'm hot. And I can't just go off and pee in the bushes.

BURT
Sure you could. Just drop trow and let 'er rip.

He is still trying to be amiable, to make up.

VICKY
You're disgusting.

This flows over Burt. He has turned back to the corn and is regarding it thoughtfully.

BURT
Except maybe you'd want to tie a string to the car aerial so you could find your way back. I damn near got lost in there, Vicky. That's no shit.

—

VICKY
Can we go now? Sir?

8 (CONT'D) 8

BURT
Sure.

BURT crosses and gets in. He starts the motor. The Thunderbird swings out onto the road — again, completely empty except for this one car.

9 IN THE CORN 9

The BOY is still running, his terror even greater than before. He's almost fagged out now — he trips over his own feet and falls. He starts to get up.

A HAND falls on his shoulder. The BOY utters a squeak of fright, the sound of a bird caught in the hunter's snare.

10 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD — PANNING 10

The car slams past us from right to left. As it passes, we see a sign which reads GATLIN and an arrow pointing left.

11 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 11

VICKY
Where are we?

BURT
Nebraska.

VICKY
Yes, Burt. I know we're in Nebraska, Burt. But where the hell are we?

BURT gives up trying to be Mr. Nice Guy. She's spoiling for a fight; now she's got one.

BURT
You've got the road atlas. Look it up. You remember how to read, don't you?

VICKY
Such wit. This is why we got off the turnpike. So we could look at three hundred miles of corn. And enjoy the wit and wisdom of Burt Stanton.

BURT
Vicky, will you get off it? Will you just please for Chrissake get off it?

11 (CONT'D) 11

He turns on the radio.

SOUND: Buddy Holly and the Crickets singing "That'll Be the Day."

He turns it up loud.

12 THE ROAD AND THE CORN - HIGH ANGLE 12

The road extends for miles in either direction, deserted except for the Thunderbird. And corn is absolutely everywhere. There is something disquieting about the T-Bird's isolation as it moves along the slender black ribbon amid all that green.

SOUND: Faintly we hear Buddy Holly still singing.

13 IN THE CORN - EXTREME CU - THE BOY 13

The BOY is panting and struggling, trying to get away from a muscular, tanned ARM that has him pinned across the shoulders. Cornsilk is plastered to his neck and cheeks and forehead.

SOUND: An eerie, atonal, almost-human humming.

A HAND grips the BOY's hair and JERKS his head back. A KNIFE comes into frame — and before we know what is happening, the BOY'S THROAT HAS BEEN CUT. Blood gushes down his shirt.

14 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 14

VICKY is looking coldly out the window.

A struggle is mirrored on BURT's face. At last he tries again.

BURT
I'm sorry.

VICKY
(colorlessly)
All right. Fine.

BURT
It's just that I've driven fifteen hundred miles on turnpikes since we left Boston. And since you wouldn't drive—

VICKY
You know I get migraines.

14 (CONT'D) 14

BURT
I know. Oh, don't I know it. Just listen, okay? I asked if you'd navigate for me on some of these secondary roads, and you said sure.

VICKY
(sulking)
I have been.

BURT
Then if you want to know where we are, just look!

VICKY leans forward and thumbs open the glove compartment with one angry jab. She pulls out a dogeared Rand-McNally road atlas and begins to page through it. She finds the right map and traces the roads with her finger.

15 IN THE CORN - THE BOY - MOVING 15

Tracking backwards to pace him as he STAGGERS toward CAMERA, eyes blank and bulging. His hands are up to his throat, and BLOOD is flowing through his fingers, bright and sparkling. The front of his shirt is sodden. Behind him we see a trail of twisted, broken corn plants, some splashed and daubed with blood. His suitcase has been abandoned.

16 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 16

VICKY is still concentrating on the map. BURT divides his attention as he drives.

BURT
Well?

VICKY
We left the turnpike at Hamburg, right?

BURT
Right.

VICKY shuts the road atlas and shoves it back in the glovebox.

VICKY
The main road forks up ahead. One fork goes to a place called Gatlin, the other to a place called Hemingford Home. They're both just wide places in the road,

16 (CONT'D) 16

VICKY (CONT'D)
but Gatlin looks closer. Do you suppose we could stop there and get something to eat? Or does your almighty schedule say we have to go on until two o'clock, like we did yesterday?

BURT takes his eyes off the road and turns to look at her. She has struck a real sore spot, but he speaks with a measured coldness.

BURT
I've about had it, Vicky. As far as I'm concerned, we can call it off right now and go home.

VICKY faces forward again, her face stony and set. Suddenly she sees something ahead, and terror floods into her face.

BURT (CONT'D)
Because this isn't working at—

VICKY
(screaming)
Burt, look out—!

17 THE ONCOMING THUNDERBIRD 17

As the Bird enters frame from the right, moving fast, the BOY staggers out of the corn extreme left. His hands are up to his throat. His knees are buckling, but he's still on his feet. Barely.

18 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 18

BURT snaps forward and flashes on the BOY in the road.

BURT
Jesus—

SOUND: Screeching brakes and tires — continuing.

19 THE BOY IN THE ROAD 19

Everything happens extremely fast:

The CAR is beginning to skid and slew off to one side, blue smoke rising from the locked wheels. The BOY begins to crumple even before the car hits him.

19 (CONT'D) 19

SOUND: A THUMP

The body is a huddled shape on the tar.

The Thunderbird starts to skid around broadside, in grave danger of rolling over.

20 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 20

BURT is jockeying the wheel.

VICKY
(screaming)
Burt—!

The Thunderbird comes to a shuddering, quivering halt. VICKY is thrown into the dashboard. BURT, wearing his seat belt, merely snaps forward and is yanked back. Then SILENCE — except for the idling motor as VICKY peels herself off the dash. She has a bruise on her right cheekbone, under the eye.

BURT puts his hand slowly up to his face and rubs it.

BURT
(at last)
A dog. Tell me it was a dog, Vicky.

VICKY
Oh God! It was a boy. A little boy. He just ran out of the corn there and—

She rips open her door and leans out. SOUND of her vomiting. BURT slowly takes his hands away from his face and looks up at the rear-view mirror.

21 BURT'S POV - IN THE MIRROR 21

The road disappearing into the distance. About a hundred and fifty feet back, a heaped bundle in the road...the BOY'S BODY.

22 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 22

BURT is staring up into the mirror as if mesmerized. VICKY leans back in and pulls the door shut. Drained of all strength, she lets her eyes slip closed.

VICKY
This time you've really done it, Burt. That's manslaughter.

22 (CONT'D) 22

BURT
Knock it off.

VICKY
(with rising hysteria)
Is that the way you handled it over in Nam?

No, of course not. You had— other methods.

BURT
Stop it, Vicky, you're hysterical.

VICKY
What do you call this? Bringing it all back home? Oh God Burt you ran him down he was just a little boy and you—

BURT slaps her. Hard. Her head rocks with the blow. Her hysteria snaps, but she has a dull, shocked look.

BURT
(flatly)
You're rabid, you know that, Vicky? Six years it's taken me to figure out what's wrong with you. You've got a fuckin' terminal case of rabies.

23 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 23

Parked askew on the white line at the end of a long double skidmark. The driver's door opens and BURT gets out. His face is pale and set. For a moment he just stands there, getting ready to do it. Then he walks back toward the body with almost para-military discipline, a tight man who moves well.

The passenger door opens. VICKY gets out. For a moment she stands there. Finally she goes after him.

24 THE BOY'S BODY 24

The body is spread-eagled on the white line, face down.

VICKY halts about six paces away, unable to come closer. BURT stands looking down, fists clenched.

VICKY puts a hand to her mouth. She can't look down, yet can't not look.

24 (CONT'D) 24

But BURT can. If he's done it, he wants to see what he's done. He drops to one knee and checks for vital signs in two quick, professional gestures. First at the wrist, then at the throat.

He lets the wrist drop.

VICKY
(dully)
He's dead, isn't he?

BURT
(flat)
Oh, yeah.

VICKY
You took your eyes off the road, Burt. Could they put you in jail?

VICKY begins to cry, but weakly, with no real force.

BURT takes no notice. He is in a world of his own now, alone with what he has done, sweating heavily — it stands out on his cheeks and forehead. He goes down on both knees and reaches for the BOY's shoulders with great effort. He snatches his hands away immediately, as if the body is hot. A momentary pained tic of revulsion on his face, which then becomes expressionless again. He reaches out once more.

VICKY
What are you doing?

BURT
Turning him over.

VICKY
No! You're not supposed to touch anything.

BURT
I want to see what I did.

25 BURT'S POV - THE BODY 25

BURT's hands come into frame, grasping the shoulders, turning the body over. We hear a low peeling SOUND — like tape being pulled — as the BOY's shirt — or perhaps his skin — is peeled off the road surface.

The body flops over bonelessly. The eyes are open. And it is plain now that the throat has been cut from ear to ear.

25 (CONT'D) 25

BURT'S VOICE
Oh—dear—God.

26 ANGLE ON BURT 26

He is looking off toward the corn...simply away from what he has seen. In different circumstances he would be looking at his wife, but we know how it is between them.

We see shocked horror on his face, disgust, revulsion. Then — the realization that he may be off the hook. He looks down at the body again. His face is grim, but the revulsion is gone. He glances around for VICKY.

27 VICKY 27

She has withdrawn about twenty feet and is looking away. She doesn't want to see this.

28 BURT 28

Looking again at the boy's body.

BURT
(murmuring)
A bayonet. A kitchen knife.
Maybe a cleaver.

He gets to his feet slowly and walks toward the corn, looking around — everywhere. He has gone tight. He could be a point-man on a scouting expedition in the jungle — and the corn looks a bit like a jungle.

He stands at the edge of the tar and looks out at it.

29 BURT'S POV - THE CORN 29

It seems to stretch away forever — a green jungle, a green ocean.

Throughout we hear the SOUND of the wind through the corn, rustling it. An eerie sound — and perhaps not so different from that weird, atonal humming we heard when the BOY's throat was cut.

30 VICKY — FOLLOWING

She turns back toward BURT with visible effort and takes a step or two toward him. BURT is just looking out at the corn, very still, very erect.

30 (CONT'D) 30

VICKY
Burt...?

He doesn't turn.

VICKY
Burt, look at me!

But he won't. She walks toward him. Her dull shock is beginning to fade and her first reaction — a kind of hysterical anger — has begun to reappear.

VICKY
Answer me, damn you! What are we going to do about this? Huh? Wait for some old farmer to come along hauling a manure-spreader? Wait for him to draw flies?

No reaction — BURT might as well have turned to stone. But his eyes are moving, scanning everything, never still.

His lack of reaction makes Vicky even more furious.

VICKY
(yelling)
Don't tell me you've crapped out? The big Viet Nam war hero? Come on, John Wayne, what are we going to do? (almost pleading) Burt, I'm scared.

BURT
Lower your voice.

For a moment VICKY is nonplussed. She may have expected him to say anything in the world but that. But he has never even looked at her — he is staring into the corn.

VICKY
Burt, what in God's name is wrong with you?

No response. BURT shades his eyes. Glances left and right into the corn. Not at her.

VICKY
Do you have any conception of what you've done? That little boy is dead, Burt! You ran him down and you killed him!

30 (CONT'D) 30

BURT turns and looks at her at last.

BURT
I ran him down. But I didn't kill him.

VICKY
What are you talking about?

BURT
Look at him.

She makes no move to do so; her face registers revulsion at the thought. She only looks fearfully at BURT, afraid that maybe he really has gone Section Eight.

BURT
(impatiently)
Go on, look at him. I haven't gone crazy. I'm not jiving you. His throat's been cut. Somebody scragged him.

VICKY draws in a startled gasp.

VICKY
Burt, you're—

BURT
You like the idea that I killed him too well to give it up? Is that it?

VICKY
Of course not! That's—

BURT (in full command)
Then go on. Look.

31 BURT AND VICKY - A NEW ANGLE 31

Framed by cornstalks and flat leaves of corn, some of them broken by the boy's flight. On one leaf there is a bright spot of BLOOD.

VICKY walks to the center of the road where the BOY's huddled body lies. She stands there, not wanting to look. Finally she forces herself. And screams.

32 ANGLE ON VICKY 32

Her face is a mask of horror as she looks down at the body. Abruptly she turns away.

32 (CONT'D) 32

BURT comes up and puts an arm around her. His face doesn't change. It is a gesture of comfort, the way a tech sergeant might buck up a scared recruit. He needs her, but not in hysterics.

He is wired. His eyes are alight, alive as they go over her head to the corn. Someone may be watching...and he knows it.

BURT
Settle down.

VICKY
What happened, Burt? What happened to him? I...I don't understand any of this.

BURT
I don't, either. Let's walk back to the car for a minute.

VICKY
But what happened? He...his throat...the blood...

BURT
Yeah. I know. Come on.

33 BURT AND VICKY - MOVING 33

Following them back toward the car. VICKY is scared and confused. BURT has his arm around her. His expression says that he accepts the challenge of the situation and, in a weird way, he might even be beginning to enjoy it.

VICKY
(babbling)
I just don't understand how something like that—

BURT
(low)
Listen to me, Vicky. Don't look up, don't look around, no matter what. His throat was cut. And the corn back there where he came out was all bent and twisted—

When she jerks her head to look back over her shoulder, he clamps down on her arm. Hard.

VICKY
Ow, Burt, you're hurting me—!

33 (CONT'D) 33

BURT
Don't look back there, I said. Okay?

VICKY
(scared)
Okay, okay!

BURT
Somebody cut his throat in the corn. . .

There's something else in there, too. I think it's a box of some kind.

VICKY
Why would anyone cut...cut a little boy's throat, Burt?

BURT
I don't know. All I know for sure is they cut his throat and the kid ran out into the road and I ran him down. But he was as good as dead when I hit him. You don't go to anymore Kiwanis meetings after you've had your throat cut.
You get twenty, maybe thirty seconds. His jugular vein and carotid artery. Both severed.

VICKY
(sickened)
Burt, stop it.

They reach the rear of the T-Bird.

BURT
Get in.

Dazed, she starts for the passenger side. He stops her.

BURT
No, get behind the wheel.

VICKY
What are you going to do?

BURT
Just do it, okay?

33 (CONT'D) 33

VICKY
But what are you going to do?

BURT
Move! Do I have to say it again?

She cringes briefly, then glares at him. She goes — but in a bitchy, sulky manner. BURT walks with her and waits as she slides behind the wheel.

BURT
Give me the keys.

She reaches for the ignition.

VICKY
(defiantly)
Why?

BURT
So I can put him in the trunk. Did you think we were going to leave him in the middle of the road? Maybe call UPS to pick him up?

VICKY
What does it matter which fucking keys you use?

BURT
I want to open the trunk. I also want you to leave the motor running.

VICKY
Why in the name of God—?

BURT
(matter-of-fact)
Oh, Christ, Vicky, just start the motor and wait for me. If anyone comes out of the cornfield, you be ready to bug out—

VICKY (whining)
You said I wouldn't have to drive.

33 (CONT'D) 33

BURT
—No matter how innocent they look. You understand? You be ready to drop it into drive and haul ass. You know how to steer. You can do that much, can't you?

Now she begins to grasp the nature of the danger — as Burt has done almost from the beginning.

VICKY
I don't want to sit in this car all by myself.

BURT
At this point I don't really care what you want. You do it.

She fumbles in her purse for the extra keys and hurls them at him. They strike his chest and fall to the ground. He bends over, picks them up, bounces them once in his hand and then closes his fist over them. His expression does not change.

He turns away. She leans out and screams after him. Tears coming down.

VICKY
I'm scared! Is that all right, sir? Is it all right for me to be scared, sir?

He doesn't break stride. He is walking back to the trunk, as if involved in a real challenge for the first time in years.

BURT
Just get a hold of yourself.

34 ANGLE ON BURT 34

He opens the trunk, then pockets the keyring. The trunk is filled with vacation rickrack: another suitcase, two cased tennis rackets, a golf bag, souvenirs. On the trunk's back ledge are two folded sleeping bags. BURT rearranges the stuff, making a place for the body.

35 THE FRONT OF THE T-BIRD - FEATURING VICKY 35

She is leaning out of the driver's window, looking back to see what BURT's doing.

36 THE REAR OF THE T-BIRD - FEATURING BURT 36

He takes out one of the folded blankets and walks back down the road toward the body. His back is very straight, but he moves with the easy stride of a Marine or Green Beret. There is a heavy line of sweat down the back of his shirt.

37 THE FRONT OF THE T-BIRD - FEATURING VICKY 37

She is still leaning out, following BURT's progress. In the background: the hood of the car and the road stretching onward, corn coming up to the soft shoulder on either side.

The corn to the right SHAKES a little — and a teen-age BOY, MALACHAI, steps out. He is dressed in plain rural clothes. He is clutching a long knife in one hand.

MALACHAI comes to the center of the road and pauses there, looking at VICKY, whose head is turned away. He pauses, deciding what to do. Then — he crosses and re-enters the corn on the other side.

A bare second after he disappears, VICKY turns around and looks up the road.

38 VICKY 38

She is staring straight ahead, eyes wide, face stiff. She has heard — or sensed — something. But she is not a soldier and lets it pass.

39 VICKY'S POV - THE ROAD 39

Empty. Stretching straight as a string, forever. The corn waves gently.

40 WITH BURT - OVER THE BODY 40

He speaks to the dead BOY, really only murmuring.

BURT (with full emotion)
I'm sorry as hell about this, fella.

He shakes out the blanket and settles it over the body, then squats and swiftly but carefully tucks in the edges. He is competent, professional. He has covered bodies before, perhaps even the bodies of children.

40 (CONT'D) 40

He leaves the blanketed form and crosses to where the boy came out of the corn. He stands there, looking into it.

41 BURT'S POV - THE CORN 41

From here the boy's trail is clear. The twisted and broken stalks mark it well, and there are blood droplets on many of the leaves. They stand out clearly against the green.

42 BURT - MOVING 42

He walks down the soft shoulder and into the corn, following the boy's backtrail. He pauses by one of the blooded leaves, touches it. He rubs his thumb and forefinger together thoughtfully, then wipes them on his pants.

He moves on — and there is the SUITCASE. It is splattered with blood, lying in the center of the scene of the struggle. Here many cornstalks lean drunkenly or have been snapped off. A lot of blood splashed around.

BURT squats beside the suitcase. It is held shut by two tightly-knotted hanks of clothesline. He runs a finger along one of these.

SOUND: Rustling in the corn.

BURT reacts at once, his eyes narrowing, his body tensing. He does not rise to his feet.

43 LOW ANGLE - BURT'S POV - THE CORN 43

An impenetrable green wall so high that the sky can only be seen as through a screen from this angle, taller than a tall man's head.

The SOUND of rustling again — louder.

44 AT THE THUNDERBIRD 44

VICKY leans out again, scared.

VICKY
(calling)
Burt?

45 VICKY'S POV - THE HIGHWAY BEHIND 45

Deserted, empty to infinity — except for the blanket-covered corpse lying on the white line. No sign of Burt.

46 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 46

She is still looking back. When she calls again, her voice is close to breaking.

VICKY (begging)
Bur-r-rt--? Please.

The shout dies away. The RUSTLING again -- impossible to tell where it comes from. VICKY jerks front, eyes wide and panicky now. Sweat is beading on her forehead.

47 VICKY'S POV - THE HIGHWAY AHEAD 47

Absolutely deserted. Not even a body to break the monotony in this direction. Only the high, solid walls of corn.

SOUND: Rustling — louder.

48 AT THE THUNDERBIRD - FOLLOWING VICKY 48

As she opens the door and stumbles back toward the body.

SOUND: Her breathing - quick and shallow.

As she gets as far as the open trunk, BURT emerges from the corn with suitcase in his hand. They stand there, fifty feet apart, staring at each other. Then VICKY's shoulders slump with relief.

VICKY
Burt! Thank God.

BURT
(furious)
I told you to stay in the car!

VICKY
I thought I heard something...
and I looked back....I didn't
see you...and...and...

BURT
Get in. That's an order!

VICKY
(screaming)
Fuck your orders!

BURT stands looking at her. A silent confrontation. She gives in and goes back to the driver's door, every line of her body registering fury.

49 FOLLOWING BURT 49

SOUND of the car door slamming as BURT crosses to the blanket-wrapped corpse and gently picks it up, still holding the suitcase awkwardly. He walks back to the T-Bird and sets the suitcase down. He puts the body *carefully into the trunk and shuts it. He picks up the* suitcase and goes around to the driver's side.

BURT
Push over.

The fury has drained out of Vicky, leaving her face pallid and withdrawn. She slides over with no argument. BURT opens the door and hands the suitcase in, but she shrinks from it.

BURT
For God's sake, Vicky.

VICKY
It's covered with blood.
His blood.

BURT
Will you just please take it?

VICKY
No.

He leans in and sets the suitcase on the floor. VICKY moves her feet as far away from it as she can. BURT gets in, slams the door, drops the T-Bird into gear *and squeals out.*

CAMERA HOLDS and lingers.

The Bird accelerates, dwindling. As it reaches the horizon --no more than a sunflash in the camera's eye--THREE BOYS come out of the corn, MALACHAI and two younger boys. (MALACHAI still has his knife.)

ISAAC
(to MALACHAI)
This should not have happened.

Other young BOY nods in agreement.

(Continued...)

50 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 50

A silence as BURT concentrates on his driving, moving fast. VICKY studies her hands. At last she looks up and speaks in a small, hurt voice.

VICKY
I was afraid.

BURT looks around at her, snapped back into reality.

BURT
Huh?

(Continued...)

50 (CONT'D) 50

VICKY
Afraid. I was afraid. When you went into the corn. I felt...I felt as if someone was watching me.

BURT
Maybe somebody was.

VICKY
(startled)
What?

BURT
You know what I'm talking about. Someone killed him -- he or they could still have been around. That's why it was so stupid of you to get out of the car. That's why I yelled. That blood was still fresh, still hot.

VICKY
(revolted)
Don't, Burt.

BURT
Blood starts to clot in four minutes, Vicky. Just four minutes. Whoever did it had to still be in the area. Hiding in the corn. You could hide an army in there.

(pause)
Someone was there, all right. I could feel him--or them--watching me.

As soon as BURT begins talking like this, the combative light flickers in VICKY's eyes again. This is an old argument between them, a well-chewed bone. He is, in effect, pushing her START button.

VICKY
That was the high point of your life, wasn't it? The good old Special Forces in Viet Nam. 'Scragged,' isn't that what you said, Burt? Someone scragged him? Sure it was. Sometimes I think you wish you were still there--that you could just go on smoking dope and making sweeps for the rest of your life.

50 (CONT'D) 50

But this time Burt isn't going to pick up the bone. His face shows only a certain weary contempt.

BURT
Light me a cigarette.

For a moment she balks. BURT looks at her, and after a second she takes a pack from her purse, lights one, then the other, and gives one to him.

BURT
What did you say the next town is?

VICKY
The road forks up here. Gatlin's closer. You want to bear left.

BURT
Did it look big enough to have a police station?

VICKY
I don't know.

BURT
Swell.

A pause. VICKY looks out the window, rubbing her arms nervously.

VICKY
Burt, we haven't seen a car or truck since we got off the Interstate back there. It's weird.

BURT
(shrugs, softening)
Yeah, the locals must be having one hell of a baked bean supper somewhere. Or maybe it's the Nebraska State Bingo Championship.

Another pause — then VICKY returns to what is really on her mind.

VICKY
Why, Burt? Why would anyone want to do that to a kid?

BURT
We might get an idea from what's in there.

50 (CONT'D) 50

He nods toward the suitcase.

VICKY
You really think so?

BURT
(shrugs)
No, probably not. But anything's possible. You want to open it?

VICKY
Well...okay.

BURT
Hey.

VICKY
What?

BURT
Thanks.

Temporary truce, and Vicky feels it. She shoots him a grateful glance, and then with some distaste picks up the suitcase, starts to put it on her lap, recoils slightly from the blood again, and sets it on the seat between them instead.

51 THE THUNDERBIRD - PANNING 51

TRACKING it as it roars by, moving fast, past a sign: GATLIN 7. The print is so old and faded it is barely legible.

52 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 52

VICKY is working on the knots of clothesline around the suitcase.

VICKY
Didn't we pass a house back there?

BURT
Yeah. Deserted. Windows boarded up. No power-feeds from the road. No good, babe.

VICKY
I think you see everything. It spooks me sometimes, Burt. It really does.

52 (CONT'D) 52

BURT
I just feel as if this is my responsibility. I hit him, even if he was bleeding to death when I did. You understand? I don't see everything, Vicky. *I sure as shit didn't see him.* I took my eye off the road.

VICKY utters a noncommittal sound. She is not particularly moved by what he's saying — maybe because she was at least partly to blame for the accident. A silence between them. She bends back to the clothesline knot and picks at it again.

BURT
Town will at least have a constable.

VICKY
Oh.

BURT
Can't get those knots?

VICKY
I'll get them. It's just—

An expression crosses her face. Yuck, it says.

VICKY (cont'd)
The blood's greased right into the knots. It makes them... slippery.

BURT
Leave it, if you want.

VICKY
There! Got one.

BURT
Good girl.

VICKY looks up, startled. These may be the first reasonable, positive words that have passed between them in some time. Encouraged, he touches her shoulder.
She works on another knot as they drive on.

BURT
Would you mind the radio?

VICKY
(pleased to be consulted)
No, I'd love some music.

52 (CONT'D) 52

BURT turns it on. He works the tuner knob. SOUND of crackling STATIC and, occasionally, faint garbled voices.

He turns up the volume. More STATIC -- CONTINUING. He moves the tuner again.

BURT
Put that down when we get back to Massachusetts, Vicky. In Nebrasks, radio hasn't been invented yet.

VICKY
Nothing at all?

BURT
(still tuning)
Zilch.

VICKY
Oh, the other knot's coming now. Just a minute--

All of a sudden the RADIO BLARES at full volume:

RADIO PREACHER - (probably MALACHAI)
ATONEMENT!

Burt and Vicky react with startled surprise. Vicky's hands jerk and the suitcase, still bound by one rope, tumbles to the floor.

CONGREGATION
Amen...hallelujah...oh yeah, brother ...tell 'em!

RADIO PREACHER
Only by the blood of the lamb are we saved! Only by His watching eye are we kept from the sins of the world!

VICKY picks up the suitcase and glances out the window. BURT turns the radio down.

53 EXT. RADIO TOWER - BURT'S POV 53

The top half of a TOWER, tall and spidery, is visible on the horizon, poking up above the ubiquitous corn.

RADIO PREACHER (CONT'D)
Atonement is the word, brothers and sisters. Atonement's the word, ain't it? Ain't that the word we reckon with?

53 (CONT'D) 53

CONGREGATION
Yeah...you tell it...oh sweet Jesus...

54 BURT AND VICKY 54

BURT hooks a thumb toward the tower, which is now falling behind them.

BURT
No wonder it came in five-by, kiddo. We're right on top of the damn radio tower.

VICKY glances up as the RADIO PREACHER continues:

RADIO PREACHER
There's some that thinks it's okay to get out in the world, as if you could walk in the world, as if you could walk there and work there and not be smirched by the ways of the world. Now is that what the Word of God teaches us?

CONGREGATION
NO!

Now the RADIO PREACHER's words come in a pumping, driving cadence, the hard rhythm of the professional tent-show revivalist. Brother Love's Travelling Salvation Show comes to mind.

RADIO PREACHER
(bellowing)
HOLY JESUS!

VOICES
(transport of joy)
Holy Jesus!

RADIO PREACHER
When they gonna find out that way is death? Huh? When they gonna find out that the world's wages are paid in the hot halls of hell? Huh? What about that, my brothers and sisters? The Lord has said there are many mansions in His house. But there's no room there for the fornicator! NO VACANCY! No room for the defiler of the corn! NO VACANCY! No room for the hommasexshul! NO VACANCY! *No room for the—*

54 (CONT'D) 54

VICKY leans forward and snaps the radio off.

VICKY
Come on, Burt. I hate that shit.

BURT begins to speak in a higher version of the PREACHER's voice, sounding a bit like Flip Wilson's Geraldine.

BURT
No room for the college graduate!
No room for the Tupperware salesman,
no, Lawd! No room for those who let
their dogs do ka-ka on the sidewalk
instead of in the gutter! Hallelujah,
brethern, amen! Skippy Peanut Butter!
No room for—

VICKY
Stop it, Burt. It's not funny.
That drivel makes me sick.

BURT
(thoughtfully)
What did he say about the corn?

VICKY goes back to the second clothesline knot. She is upset.

VICKY
I don't know. I wasn't listening.

BURT
He said something about the corn, I
know he did. Something weird. It—

He breaks off as something catches his eye.

BURT
My God, there <u>is</u> life in Nebraska!

VICKY
What—?

55 EXT. GAS STATION - WIDE 55

The T-Bird rolls up to a GAS STATION and turns onto the dusty old tarmac at the point where the road branches in a Y. The main road bears right. A secondary road — rutted two-lane blacktop so narrow that two converging cars would have to creep to get by each other — veers left.

The station is very old; just how old can be judged by the rusty MOBILGAS sign with flying red Pegasus. There are two ancient pumps on the island and, near the office, a third pump with a hand-lettered sign: DEISEL.

55 (CONT'D) 55

Attached to the office is a lean-to gift shop, featuring dusty postcards and what appear to be local souvenirs made out of corn ears and cobs.

BURT eases the Bird toward the single garage bay, which is shut, and kills the ignition.

56 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 56

VICKY
(nervous)
Burt, are you sure anyone's here?

BURT
It doesn't matter, but yeah. I saw his head in the office. I just want to use the pay phone around the side.

VICKY
Phone?

BURT
(patiently)
I have to report it, Vicky. The murder.

She flinches at the word.

57 EXT. GAS STATION 57

The OWNER/ATTENDANT comes out of his office into the beating sun. This guy is the apotheosis of hick; about seventy, wearing oil-stained biballs and clunky work shoes. He moves slowly, pauses, shades his eyes with a shaking hand, and looks back down the road in the direction from which the Thunderbird has come. There's something in his face...fear, almost certainly, but concealed. He drops his hand and comes toward them.

58 ANGLE ON T-BIRD - BURT & VICKY - THROUGH WINDSHIELD 58

BURT
We're not going to mention what happened to this guy. All right?

VICKY
(doubtful)
If you think so—

BURT
I do.

He gets out as the OLD MAN arrives at the car and starts to wipe the windshield with a filthy rag.

59 WIDER 59

BURT
Hello there.

OLD MAN
Got no gas. Gas is tight right now. Ain't got none.

BURT
We don't—

OLD MAN
No regular.

BURT
I just want to use the—

OLD MAN
No high-test, neither.

BURT
What I want to do is—

OLD MAN
I got diesel, but there's water in the tank and it ain't worth a shit. Did you see the truck?

As he talks the OLD MAN continues to massage their windows with the dirty rag — and to smile. Too much.

BURT
Pardon me?

OLD MAN
Truck. The delivery truck. My delivery. You see it?

BURT
No, we didn't see a truck.

OLD MAN
Big tanker truck? Prob'ly would have said Mobil on the side.

BURT
No. Pardon me, but I don't need gas, I only want to—

OLD MAN
But it mighta said Conoco. Those oil companies are all thick as thieves. I can't help you, mister. You go on down to Hemingford Home. Just bear right. Plenty of gas in Hemingford.

59 (CONT'D) 59

BURT
I want to make a—

OLD MAN
Rest rooms are out of order, too.

BURT
No, a phone call.

OLD MAN
Phone's out of order, too.
Suppose I should get it all fixed,
but I'm retiring....Had enough.

VICKY
(in car)
Oh, dear Christ.

The OLD MAN looks over BURT's shoulder at her, and that expression of fright butters his face again.

OLD MAN
You c'n make a phone call in
Hemingford, too.

BURT glances at the roads.

BURT (almost resigned)
Hemingford—?

VICKY
No, Gatlin, Burt. Gatlin's closer.

OLD MAN
Pardon me, ma'am, you know your
own business, but you ought to go
down to Hemingford. There's nothing
in Gatlin.
(pause)
Nothing for you.

BURT (taking up with VICKY)
It's a town, isn't it?

OLD MAN
Yeah, but—

BURT
Okay, thanks.

He has dismissed the old man. He gets back into the Thunderbird and starts it up.

59 (CONT'D) 59

OLD MAN
You got a busted headlight, mister.

BURT says nothing. Only looks at the OLD MAN. Hard.

OLD MAN
Blood on it, too. Looks like you must've hit something. Some animal, I reckon.

BURT
Yeah. Thanks.

The OLD MAN pauses nervously, harried and uneasy...browbeaten. He looks up the road again, but the road is still deserted.

OLD MAN
I'd fix that headlight for you, but I ain't got any that'd fit. But you could get it taken care of—

BURT
In Hemingford.

OLD MAN
(relieved)
Yeah.

BURT
Well, thanks...but we've got some *trouble*.
Gatlin's closer.
We're going to Gatlin.

BURT drops into reverse, but doesn't pull out. Not yet. He's working the old man very carefully. The OLD MAN is almost wringing his hands as BURT stares at him. VICKY only looks curious; this battle of wits is going over her head almost entirely.

OLD MAN
(*with effort*)
Mister, if I was you, I'd go to Hemingford Home. Yes sir, I would.
(pause)
I'd stay right out of Gatlin. I'd drive right on an' not stop till I saw civilization, and then I'd pop right in and say howdy-do to the nice folks in Hemingford Home! Worth the trip!

59 (CONT'D) 59

BURT
Why?

The OLD MAN looks around, but there's nothing to see. Only corn and the empty road.

OLD MAN
People in Gatlin are...funny.

BURT
How?

OLD MAN
They all got religion in Gatlin.

BURT
(laughs)
I thought everybody in Nebraska had religion. It sure sounds like it on the radio.
(pause)
No, you'll have to do better.

OLD MAN
I've said enough. Enough to you.

BURT
Okay.

He starts to back out. The OLD MAN comes toward the rolling car.

OLD MAN
You sure you didn't see my delivery truck?

BURT
Sure.

OLD MAN
Did you see anybody? A ice cream truck, maybe, full o' sody pop? Heh heh!

BURT
Haven't seen anybody...except one little boy.

A strong reaction to this, out of all proportion — that expression of fear again. The OLD MAN shuffles back toward his office. BURT leans out, a trifle disappointed, perhaps; this fish has gotten away.

59 (CONT'D) 59

BURT
(calling)
You sure you haven't got *something more to tell me?*

OLD MAN
I got nothing to tell you, mister. Nothing. Nothing!

60 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 60

VICKY
What was that all about?

BURT
We'll probably never find out. Whatever his game is, it's not worth worrying about.

The car is now idling half across the road. BURT shifts in Drive and pulls out with a screech of tires. The T-Bird doesn't hesitate. It takes the lefthand fork. Toward Gatlin.

61 EXT. GAS STATION OFFICE - THROUGH THE WINDOW 61

Around a sign reading NO GAS TO-DAY, a pyramid of oil cans and dead flies — an old pin-up calendar on one dingy wall. Through the dirty plate-glass we see the OLD MAN lost in thought, rocking in a chair.

62 EXT. THE THUNDERBIRD - PANNING 62

It whips past, doing maybe sixty. Down the road, a sign: GATLIN 5.

63 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 63

VICKY gets the suitcase open and begins to take things out, placing them neatly on the seat. BURT divides his attention between the road and the contents.

VICKY
Socks...a pair of pants...another pair of pants, jeans...what could he have been scared about, Burt?

BURT
I don't know, and that's the honest-to-God truth. Of course he saw that broken headlight...maybe that was it. Must have been.

63 (CONT'D) 63

VICKY
Another shirt...a string tie with a cowboy on it...

She holds up a Western-style tie with a peeling neck clasp. BURT does a double-take, then plucks it from her for a closer look.

BURT
Man, that's a real golden oldie. Bill Boyd as Hopalong Cassidy. I haven't seen one of these in twenty years. I guess.

VICKY begins to cry silently. She takes the string-tie back and arranges it gently on top of the shirt.

VICKY
Oh.

BURT glances over at her with concern.

BURT
Vic? You okay?

VICKY
Yes. It just got to me a little.

BURT
Why don't you leave the rest of that stuff for the police or the constable or whoever?

VICKY
(Shaky. Looking at Burt)
Maybe I will.

63A EXT. THE THUNDERBIRD

Vicky holding onto BURT. It is a tender moment.

(Continued...)

64 EXT. THE GAS STATION - A BIT LATER 64

Peeling in the afternoon sun, it seems utterly deserted. MOVING along the right side to the back, past LADIES and MEN, to a small yard, oil-stained, littered with parts and old tires. Behind the yard, of course, is the corn. Thick and impenetrable.

SOUND: RUSTLING — coming closer.

And WHISPERS — we can't make out any of the words.

The nearer corn begins to SHAKE — SOMEONE IS IN THE CORN, approaching.

(Continued...)

65 IN THE THUNDERBIRD. 65

The suitcase is still open on Vicky's lap, but she seems to have forgotten it.

BURT
(casually)
Did anything strike you funny about that sermon we heard on the radio?

VICKY
Nothing about it struck me funny. I heard enough of that crap as a kid to last me forever. I told you about that. I gave me heart to Jesus on an average of three times a year until I decided my mother and father were certifiable on the subject.

BURT
Yeah, but I never heard a preacher that sounded so young. They must start them in their cribs out here.

VICKY utters a short, mirthless laugh.

VICKY
So he was a teenager, so what? That's what's so monstrous about the whole trip. "Give us the children and they are ours always." They like to get hold of you while your mind's still rubber. It's damn close to murder.

66 INT. THE GAS STATION - THE OLD MAN 66

He is sitting in a frayed old easy-chair, reading a paperback called SHE DID IT FOR UNCLE. There is a SOUND: a dislodged rock, or maybe a gritting step, or maybe the soft clang of one piece of metal against another.

The OLD MAN looks up at once, the fear returning to his face.

OLD MAN
(calling)
Who's there?

No answer. He stands irresolutely for awhile, holding his place in his book with his finger. He is about to sit down — when the SOUND comes again...and a WHISPERING.

67 EXT. THE OLD MAN - MOVING 67

OLD MAN
(shrill)
Who is it?

He goes reluctantly to the door, and then out into the beating sun. He looks around. He moves toward the right side of the building, treading slowly, his feet weighted down with fear.

He stops about five feet from the corner, the closed garage-bay on his left. He licks his lips like a lizard.

No answer.

OLD MAN
I didn't tell them nothing!
Nothing!

Silence.

He begins to move again — when suddenly the overhead GARAGE DOOR is thrown UP on its tracks with a horrid, screaking BANG!

At the same instant: high-pitched, exuberant YELLS as TWO CHILDREN — the eldest about twelve, the younger no more than eight — burst out from behind the pumps where they've been hiding.

The OLD MAN screams and staggers backward — terrified.

As ARMS shoot out of the blackness of the garage and grab him — and pull him into the shadows!

68 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 68

VICKY
The older people like to see a kid preaching. That's how they get their kicks. Didn't I tell you about Baby Hortense?

BURT
No.

As VICKY speaks, her hands work through the dead boy's belongings. She isn't looking for anything, but her hands want to keep busy. If she had paper and pen, she would be doodling.

68 (CONT'D) 68

VICKY
Baby Hortense, the Singing Marvel. She was eight. She'd come on singing "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" while her daddy passed the plate.

VICKY does a hoarse, huckstering imitation of Baby Hortense's father.

VICKY (CONT'D)
Dig deep now, brothers and sisters, let's not let this little child of God down as she goes about the work of her heavenly Father.
(in her own voice)
Jesus.

69 INT. THE GARAGE BAY - TIGHT ON OLD MAN

The OLD MAN is being held by many hands, but it's hard to see much. Dark. Shadowy. He is breathing hoarsely, struggling to get away.

VOICE
(hoarse, ecstatic)
JEEESUS!

70 CU - TIRE IRON 70

as it RAISES in the shadows, hangs there for a moment, and then COMES DOWN. A vicious THUDDING SOUND. The tire iron raises into frame again, comes down again. As it raises the third time, it is dripping with BLOOD.

That strange, eerie HUMMING SOUND begins again.

The tire iron rises and descends. THUD. THUD. THUD.

The HUMMING grows louder —

71 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 71

VICKY is still speaking with increasing bitterness, her hands still exploring the boy's suitcase.

VICKY
Then there was Norman Stanton. He used to preach hellfire and brimstone in a Little Lord Fauntleroy suit. He was seven. They weren't the only ones, either. There were plenty of them on the circuit. They were good <u>draws</u>. Ruby Stampnell.

71 (CONT'D) 71

VICKY (CONT'D)
She was a ten-year-old faith healer. There was Marjoe Gortner. Oh, and the Grace Sisters. They used to come out with these little tinfoil halos over their heads and--

She breaks off abruptly and looks at something which her restless hands have dragged up from the very bottom of the suitcase. It is a CORNCOB CRUCIFIX. The Cristo is roughly indicated by the way the kernels have been gouged out. All in all, it looks a very pagan sort of artifact.

VICKY
Oh my God.

BURT
What is it?

VICKY gives it to him and then rubs her hands on her jeans with disgust. BURT examines the corncob crucifix.

72 CU - THE CORNCOB CRUCIFIX 72

Definitely a figure of Christ, the crucified human figure is done in raised relief by corn kernels. The rest of the cob is bare and bone-white. Above the figure, also picked out in corn kernels, are the letters I N R I.

73 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 73

BURT
That's a fantastic piece of workmanship. Real American Primitive. I bet there are art collectors in New York who would pay a thousand bucks for something like this.

VICKY shrinks back into her corner, pale and upset. Her voice is flat, strained.

VICKY
It's hideous. A blasphemy. Throw it out.

BURT still holds the thing, glancing down at it ocassionally, turning it over in his hand.

BURT
(reasonable)
Vicky, the police might want to see it.

73 (CONT'D) 73

VICKY
Throw it out. Will you please do that for me? I...don't... want it in the car!

74 *INT. THE GARAGE BAY - ANGLE ON LIFT - LOOKING DOWN* 74

The hydraulic LIFT is up on its greasy steel pole, and a very old car -- a '60 Merc, let's say -- is on it.

Cornstalks and husks shower the lift until it is almost covered.

The HUMMING SOUND is very loud -- CONTINUING.

Several dark, unclear figures move into frame. We see them only from the shoulders down; in the shadows they are merely shapes. They carry the OLD MAN'S BODY. His face is a mask of blood. They toss him under the lift, where he glares horribly into CAMERA.

The figures move back, but the sense of their presence remains -- as the HUMMING DRONE continues.

Now a NEW SOUND: a whining BUZZ, and the chug of an air compressor.

The lift starts down.

The lift lowers -- farther -- and CRUSHES the OLD MAN'S BODY from the chest up with an awful crunching SOUND. At the same instant the HUMMING STOPS, as if cut off with a knife.

Blood begins to trickle out from under the lift.

MALACHAI'S VOICE
Thus ever to the betrayer of the corn.

OTHERS (CHORUS)
Thus shall it be with the Interloper.

MALACHAI
This is the work of He Who Walks Behind the Rows.

CHORUS
We do his work from shine to shadow.

MALACHAI
It is well we do this.

74 (CONT'D) 74

CHORUS
Yea, verily.

MALACHAI
Amen.

CHORUS
Amen.

74A ISAAC ON THE SIDE WATCHING MALACHAI.

75 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 75

BURT
I'll put it in the back, okay? And as soon as we see the cops, we'll get rid of it. Okay?

No answer from Vicky.

BURT (CONT'D)
Vicky?

VICKY
(shouting, bitter)
Do whatever you want with it! You will anyway!

BURT looks at her, surprised by the depth of her feeling. Then he tosses the crucifix into the back seat.

76 CU - THE CRUCIFIX 76

It lands against the luggage. Its little corn kernel eyes stare out blankly.

SOUND: The HUMMING — CONTINUING

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

77 CU - A HUMAN SKULL 77

The eyesockets stare out blankly.

SOUND: The HUMMING — LOUDER

78 WIDER - TO REVEAL: A CLEARING IN THE CORN EXT. DAY 78

The SKULL belongs to the skeleton of a CRUCIFIED MAN in the center of a CLEARING. It is dressed in a few decaying blue rags. The skeleton is held together with wire — plain old baling wire, probably. It has been festooned with dried cornleaves, and cornhusks are piled around its feet like an offering.

78 (CONT'D) 78

The eyesockets stare out blankly.

SOUND: The HUMMING is abruptly CUT OFF.

79 *WIDER* 79

to reveal perhaps thirty BOYS between the ages of seventeen and twelve. A dozen GIRLS the same age. All are clad in plain, heavy rural clothing.

The youngest boy is ISAAC, about nine. All those assembled are solemn, grave, anxious. Standing next to ISAAC is a much older boy — handsome, stern. We have seen him before; this is MALACHAI, he of the bloody knife.

ISAAC
Behold, a dream did come to me in the night and the Lord did shew all this to me.

VOICES
(sighing, respectful)
Praise God...

ISAAC
A time of tribulation has come. A test is at hand.

MALACHAI
We welcome the test.

He surveys them grimly with his eyes. Most of the children will not meet his gaze, which says: You better welcome it.

ISAAC
(reproving)
Shew not your pride, Malachai, for does not the Bible say that the Lord will not lift up His countenance upon a prideful man?

MALACHAI
What did the Lord say we must do?

ISAAC stares at the Blue Man and speaks dreamily. The others are quickly caught up in his words as near-euphoria passes from face to face. In their shared emotion and surrendered individuality they are chillingly cult-like — blissed out, tripping on ISAAC's little sermonette.

Some begin to HUM again — CONTINUING — LOUDER

79 (CONT'D) 79

ISAAC
In the dream the Lord did come to me, and he was a Shape. It was He Who Walks Behind the Rows, and I did fall down in terror and hide my eyes, lest the terror of His face strike me dead. And He told me all that has since happened. He said, 'Joseph has taken his things and has fled this happy place, because the fear of Me is no more upon him. So take you his life and spill his blood, but let not his flesh pollute the corn, but cast him upon the road.'

OTHERS
Yes...so it was...yes...Joseph the Unbeliever...yes...

Under it all — the HUMMING

80 (FLASHBACK:) EXT. A SEA OF CORN DAY 80

This corn is NOT fresh and green. It is yellow — DEAD.

SOUND: The HUMMING CONTINUES

81 (FLASHBACK:) EXT. A REVIVAL TENT TWILIGHT 81

The TENT is in a CLEARING, surrounded by a sea of the skeletal yellow corn.

SOUND: A GOSPEL PIANO drifts up — as the HUMMING becomes a multitude of VOICES SINGING "Bringing in the Sheaves"

82 (FLASHBACK:) INT. THE REVIVAL TENT NIGHT 82

Beginning CLOSE-UP on the face of a REVIVAL PREACHER. He is young, no more than sixteen, earnest and righteous, sweating under candlelight or torchlight — as he roars at the congregation.

REVIVAL PREACHER
No room for the defiler of the corn! No vacancy! Now you got drought here, you got your drought right here in Gatlin, Nebraska, and there's not going to be no harvest this year, not in this Lord's year of 1968, there isn't. And say why?

The CONGREGATION that replies is very young — childish — frightened.

82 (CONT'D) 82

CONGREGATION
—Sin?—

REVIVAL PREACHER
Say that louder!

CONGREGATION
Sin!

REVIVAL PREACHER
Oh brothers and sisters, we're deep in it, so deep that there's not a man or woman in this place over the age of twenty-one who isn't deep in it, wallowing in it and loving it even as they drown like pigs in a mire! But the Book says "A little child will lead them" and the Book says "Suffer the children to come unto me" and if this town has any hope it's in you young people and so I want you to shout it out!

CONGREGATION
(roaring)
SIN!!!

The REVIVAL PREACHER bows his head and pauses. In the background we hear a few of the children SOBBING hysterically. The REVIVAL PREACHER looks up, a strange, zealous expression in his eyes.

REVIVAL PREACHER
But brothers and sisters, we know the old ways of God, isn't it so? We know there is a God of the Old Testament as well as the New, the God of sacrifice, the God who walked on the face of the Earth—

CHILD'S VOICE
(screaming, babbling)
He Who Walks Behind the Rows!
He Who Walks Behind the Rows!

A hushed, frightened, murmur.

REVIVAL PREACHER
It is as the Book says: A child shall lead them.

HUMMING begins again.

83 (FLASHBACK:) EXT. - A CLEARING IN THE CORN - SUNSET 83

SOUND: The HUMMING continues --

As a MAN IN BLUE is dragged into the clearing, kicking and screaming, by several SMALL BOYS.

One of the BOYS produces a KNIFE. ANOTHER BOY yanks the MAN'S head back by the hair, exposing a white throat...

Before we know what is happening, the KNIFE glides in --

84 (FLASHBACK:) THE SAME CLEARING - LATER 84

SOUND: The HUMMING continues --

The MAN IN BLUE has been crucified with baling wire. In the blood-red light of a smoky fire, his face is a rictus of pain and horror. A gaping WOUND has been drawn across his throat.

CHILDREN are grouped in a semi-circle at the edge of the clearing, some of them contentedly tending the fire which burns inside a small grouping of stones. One of the BOYS steps forward.

BOY
Dear God, we beg thy blessing on the crop. In the name of He Who Walks Behind the Rows, Amen.

OTHERS
Amen.

The BLUE MAN's eyes stare --

The HUMMING continues --

85 EXT. THE CLEARING AS BEFORE - GREEN DAY 85

SOUND: The HUMMING --

PANNING the shining, exalted faces of blissed-out CHILDREN as before -- ISAAC and MALACHAI's CONGREGATION.

ISAAC
And He Who Walks Behind the Rows said, 'I will send outlanders among you, a man and a woman, and these outlanders will be unbelievers and profaners of the Holy, even as those in the Court of Belshazzar. And then shall your faith be tested, as it was in the days of the Blue Man.

85 (CONT'D) 85

VOICES
The Blue Man...yes...the Blue Man...

ISAAC
And He Who Walks Behind the Rows did say, 'Be ye not like Joseph, whose faith in this happy place did desert him. For My name is strong here, and My power is great, for I am the Lord of Lords. I am He Who Walks Behind the Rows. You must make a sacrifice unto Me, and behold the unbelievers who come unto this purpose. They must be sacrificed like the Blue Man.'

MALACHAI
Make sacrifice. Yes.

ISAAC
Amen.

ALL
Amen.

MOVING IN on the grotesque wired-together SKELETON of the BLUE MAN. Its GRINNING SKULL fills the screen.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

86 EXT. A ROADSIGN DAY 86

A weatherbeaten sign reads: YOU ARE NOW ENTERING GATLIN, NICEST LITTLE TOWN IN NEBRASKA OR ANYWHERE ELSE! POP. 2438

WIDER to include the highway and the corn. A downed power line whose wires are hanging broken, sways slightly in the wind. The THUNDERBIRD passes and speeds on down the road. We pick up a BARN on the horizon. Written on the barn in large white letters is the legend: ONLY JESUS SAVES.

87 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 87

VICKY is glancing out her window. A Conoco station/cafe whips past. The pumps are deserted. Nothing in the cafe parking lot except a very old International Harvester pickup that looks as if it might be standing on two flats.

VICKY
You just passed a cafe. They'd have a phone.

87 (CONT'D) 87

BURT
We'll be in town in another minute. Hell, theirs is probably out of order, too.

VICKY
If you say so.

BURT
Come on, Vic. We'll give the body and the suitcase to the cops and then we'll be shut of it.

VICKY looks at her hands. BURT makes a short, irritated sound and taps the steering wheel impatiently. He has to see it through.

The scenery is changing. The corn has drawn back from the road and we see a few houses, with barns and silos attached or nearby. This is the transition from country to town. But there are no people, nothing moving.

VICKY gazes apathetically out the window.

Suddenly her attention is caught by something and she sits up. She begins to laugh. In a moment she is giggling hysterically, her hands pressed to her mouth.

BURT
What is it? What's so damn funny?

VICKY points and speaks through the giggles.

VICKY
The signs! Haven't you been reading them? When they called this the Bible Belt, they sure weren't kidding. Oh Lordy, there's another bunch--!

88 THE SIGNS - BURT'S POV 88

The SIGNS come up one at a time. They are planted on the right-hand shoulder of the road. There is a single word on each one. The entire set reads: A/CLOUD/BY/DAY/ A/PILLAR/OF/FIRE/BY/NIGHT

89 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 89

VICKY is still giggling, a frantic sound. BURT is merely bewildered.

89 (CONT'D) 89

VICKY
They only forgot one thing.

BURT
What?

VICKY
Burma Shave.

BURT
Vicky, are you all right?

She stops laughing; takes a tissue from her purse and wipes her eyes.

VICKY
I will be. Just as soon as we're a thousand miles away from here, in sunny sinful California with the Rocky Mountains between us and Nebraska. Look, there's some more.

90 EXT. THE SIGNS 90

FORGET/NOT/THE/GOD/OF/ABRAHAM/AND/NOAH

91 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 91

As they top a hill and come upon a bridge. They start to cross the bridge when a loud crunch is heard and a piece of the roadway is seen falling from the bridge to the shallow river below. The car stops short.

VICKY
I told you. We've been wasting our time -- we can't get through. Now will you turn around and go back to that cafe so that we can--

BURT
(surveying the scene with car door open)
No sweat.

BURT points to alternate way.

92 ANGLE TO INCLUDE BRIDGE AND SIGN 92

A smaller sign is near the bridge. It is so old it is almost falling off, but it says:

ALTERNATE ROAD

An arrow points to an impossible mud road a few yards down.

93 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 93

VICKY
You can't be serious.
Why are you being so stubborn?
Why can't we just--?

BURT
Hang on. We're almost there.

94 ANGLE ON MUD ROAD 94

As the T-BIRD noses down and slogs ahead, spinning out and throwing mud against the windows. The tires lose traction, but BURT works the wheel and shifts back and forth, rocking loose. He guns the motor -- and they fishtail off the mud road and into the town at last.

We see a crossroads, a park, some sidestreets, a few dusty elm trees. Just a sleepy little town dozing in the summer sun.

95 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 95

VICKY
Now you've really done it.
You're so pig-headed. You
got us here, all right --
you set your mind to it and
you did it. And now where
are we? Christ, what a dead-
looking little place. You
could have done something
sensible and admitted you made
a mistake and turned the car
around, but no--!

BURT
That's enough. We're here.
It'll all be behind us in a
few minutes. Just keep a tight
ass-hole for five more minutes,
all right, lady? Five minutes.
That's all I ask.

(Continued...)

95 (CONT'D) 95

VICKY
(with hate)
How did I ever end up married to a bastard like you in the first place? I wonder about that sometimes. I wonder about it a lot.

BURT
So do I, babe.

96 FOLLOWING THE THUNDERBIRD 96

The T-Bird is passing a JetGas station. A weatherbeaten sign reads HI TRUCKERS! DIESEL FUEL AROUND BACK! A gasoline price sign swings in the breeze:

REG. 35.9 HITEST 38.9

The JetGas station slips by.

(Continued...)

96 (CONT'D) 96

Passing a residential sidestreet. Wooden frame houses, neo-American Gothic. Nothing moving.

Another residential sidestreet. A dog is lying in the middle of this one, sleeping. It looks up, then settles its head back on its paws.

97 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 97

VICKY
Stop a minute.

BURT
What?

VICKY
That's right. Just stop. Right here. I need for you to stop.

BURT pulls up to the curb next to the GATLIN LUMBER COMPANY. The only SOUND is the idling engine.

VICKY
(intensely)
Let's turn around.

BURT
Huh?

VICKY
Please. We'll take the body to Hemmingford. That's not too far, is it? Let's do that. Then--we can get a room there. And have...some time to ourselves. Alone.
(touches him)

BURT
What the hell is wrong with you?

VICKY
What do you mean, what's wrong? This whole town is wrong! It's empty, Burt. There's nobody here but us! Can't you feel that?

He looks at her, considering. VICKY looks back, almost pleading.

He gets out.

97 (CONT'D) 97

He stands by the T-Bird, looking around. He is totally alert, as tightly wrapped as a winchwire. He is almost smelling the air.

98 ANGLES ON TOWN - BURT'S POV 98

MAIN STREET -- empty sidewalks. Silent storefronts.

THE GATLIN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH -- a bald, patchy lawn. A few meaningless letters left on the signboard. Cornshocks have been heaped in the doorway.

THE GATLIN BEN FRANKLIN FIVE AND DIME -- wares are displayed, barely visible through the incredibly dirty windows.

THE BIJOU THEATER MARQUEE -- movie posters so old and sun-bleached they cannot be read. The letters overhead:

E SY R DER

DENNIS HO PER P TER F NDA

BURT'S VOICE
It just seems that way. But it sure is a one-hydrant town, I have to agree with you there.

GATLIN REXALL -- also deserted, the display window thick with dust and grime. But here something has been written with a finger in the dirt, and we can read it:

HE WHO WALKS BEHIND THE ROWS SEETH ALL

More cornshocks and cornleaves have been piled in this doorway.

VICKY'S VOICE
There is no one here at all! Didn't you see the gas station we just passed?

BURT'S VOICE
Sure I did, so what?

99 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD - VICKY INSIDE 99

VICKY
The sign said thirty-five-nine for regular and thirty-eight-nine for high octane. Now how long has it been since anyone paid prices like those for gas?

99 (CONT'D) 99

BURT gets in and slams the door. His face is set, trying to refuse her logic.

BURT
It's been awhile. But Vicky--

VICKY
Why can't you admit you're wrong? Just once, why can't you admit that you're off-base, in left field, that you fucked up? Stop playing your goddamned head-games! We're right in town and we haven't seen a car moving! Not one car!

BURT's face has hardened -- he is no longer hearing her. When he speaks, his voice is low and rather dangerous.

BURT
You stop shouting at me.

A brief pause as Vicky tries to pull herself together.

VICKY
Okay. I'm sorry, all right?

BURT
Hemmingford Home or whatever the hell it's called, is more than forty miles away. It would look goddam funny if we took him all the way back there.

(Continued...)

99 (CONT'D) 99

VICKY
I don't care.

BURT
Yeah, that's always been your attitude, hasn't it? "I don't care." Let's just remember that we've got a Prom Queen here to take care of, right? Well, I'll tell you what we're going to do, Vicky. We're going to find the courthouse or the town hall or whatever the hell they've got here and—

VICKY
No!

BURT
Vicky—

VICKY
I want to get out of here.

(Continued...)

99 (CONT'D) 99

BURT
Oh boy, am I sick of your goddam tantrums.

VICKY
Burt, I swear to you this is no tantrum. There's something wrong here, I can feel it. Please let's go.

BURT
Will you pull yourself together? You're being irrational—

VICKY
I'll be a lot more rational when we're driving the other way. Now let's go.

BURT
We have a dead child in the trunk of our car!

Her face crumples and she flinches as if he had struck her.

BURT
(lower)
His throat was cut and he was shoved out into the road like a bag of garbage and I ran him down. Now I'm going to drive up to the courthouse or whatever they have here and report it. If you want to start walking back toward I-95, go on. I'll pick you up. But don't you tell me to turn around and drive to Hemmingford. I'm going to report it before the son of a bitch who wasted him is over the hills and far away.

VICKY
(crying)
Yes, sir, Captain, I forgot we were back in Dung Ho or wherever it was you won the war.

If we get out there and burn a few hootches, maybe rape a few grandmothers—

99 (CONT'D) 99

He slaps her. Her head rocks back. She fumbles for her doorhandle and gets out of the car — and stops.

100 EXT. VICKY'S POV MAIN STREET 100

Deserted. Eerie. Sinister.

101 EXT. ANGLE ON VICKY 101

She's terrified, her face streaked with tears. She really does sense something here — something.

She gets back into the car and slams the door.

102 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 102

VICKY
(hopeless)
You bastard.

BURT
It won't work anymore, Vic.
You're not pushing the buttons
anymore.
(pause)
I still feel something for you,
if that's any good to you. I think...

VICKY
Go on, finish it. You hate my guts.
I've known it for two years now.
Second honeymoon. What a laugh.

BURT
No, not hate. I don't feel any hate.
I think I feel...responsibility.

VICKY
I don't know what the hell you're
talking about.

BURT
(cooly)
No. I don't think you do.

He drops the gear selector into DRIVE and they PULL AWAY slowly from the curb.

103 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 103

Moving up Main. On the right, businesses — Woolworth's, the five and dime, a jewelry store, an appliance store, etc. On the left is the TOWN PARK.

104 ANGLE TO INCLUDE ST. JOHN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH 104

ST. JOHN'S has the same patchy lawn. The paint is peeling and blistered. The door is open — the doorway heaped high with yellowing cornstalks. The sermon-board outside is readable — and the date: September 3, 1968. The subject of that day's homily is:

THE DROUGHT AND THE WILL OF GOD

105 (OMIT) 105

106 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 106

Through the windshield, we see a solid-looking BRICK BUILDING. Main Street (which is also the highway) bends around it to the left and out of sight — out of town, presumably.

BURT
Well, that looks like something.

VICKY
Swell.

The car pulls up to the curb next to an establishment called THE GATLIN BAR AND GRILL. The motor dies and BURT opens the door.

VICKY
Where are you going?

BURT
To find out where everyone is. The sign in the window there says OPEN.

VICKY
You're not leaving me out here alone!

BURT
So come. Who's stopping you?

107 ANGLE FROM SIDEWALK - FOLLOWING 107

BURT gets out and heads for the BAR AND GRILL without looking back.

VICKY gets out quickly and catches up to him.

They stand together by the dirty plate glass window.

107 (CONT'D) 107

VICKY
Do you hear it?

BURT
Hear what?

VICKY
The nothing. No cars, no tractors, no people. No nothing, Burt. Don't you hear the nothing?

It gets to him for a moment, and then he shakes off the dark thought. He is somewhere else now.

BURT
Crock of shit, Vicky. It's quiet, that's all. It's supposed to be quiet in a little burg like this.

He goes into the BAR AND GRILL.

VICKY follows — after throwing a nervous glance over her shoulder.

108 INT. THE BAR AND GRILL 108

The place is dim and dusty...and completely empty. They stand together for a moment. Then she goes toward the plate glass window, while BURT goes toward the counter.

She stops by the windowsill and looks down. There are about a million dead flies there. She wrinkles her nose and moves on.

BURT stops by the combination counter and bar. He runs a finger along it, leaving a deep mark in the dust. Then he looks up and his brow furrows.

MENUS chalked on the blackboard:

CHEESEBURG 45¢
WORLD'S BEST JOE 10¢
STRAWBERRY RHUBARD PIE 35¢/slice
TODAY'S SPECIAL HAM & RED-EYE GRAVY $1.10
It's Good for What Ails Ya!

ALSO Budweiser, Schlitz, Coors and Pabst Blue Ribbon posters and bar displays, all of them long out of date.

BURT moves away from the counter and joins VICKY.

She is standing by one wall, looking at a calendar that shows a cute picture. The month: AUGUST 1968.

108 (CONT'D) 108

VICKY
I guess they've been at that bean supper or bingo game or county fair for twelve years or so, Burt.

BURT
(defensive)
It is a little funny, but I'm sure—

VICKY
You're sure! Sure you're sure. That's your whole trouble. You've spent your whole life being sure!

BURT's face hardens. He turns and walks to the door. VICKY takes a step or two after him.

VICKY
Where are you going?

BURT
To the Town Hall.

VICKY
Burt, why do you have to be so stubborn? You know something's wrong here. The whole town smells of it. Stinks of it.

BURT
I'm not being stubborn. I just want to get rid of the body.

He goes out. After a moment, VICKY follows.

109 EXT. THE SIDEWALK 109

BURT stands with his hands in his back pockets. A breeze comes up, ruffling his hair and sending a few papers twirling up the empty street.

VICKY scents the breeze — and grimaces.

VICKY
My God! What's that smell?

BURT
You were never a farmer's daughter. It's the stuff that makes the corn grow green. Come on.

109 (CONT'D) 109

They walk up the street. They pass a BARBER SHOP -- the interior is dusty and unused for a long time. The empty chairs stretch back into darkness.

They pass a door marked GATLIN CHRONICLE. The door is ajar. BURT peers inside.

VICKY
I wouldn't.

BURT
I know you wouldn't.

VICKY
Think what you like. I'm not going in there with you.

BURT
Fine. Whatever you want.

VICKY
I've got my keys, Burt. If you're not back in five minutes, I'll just drive away and leave you here.

BURT
Yes. You would. You'd drive off saying to yourself, "That'll teach the son of a bitch to cross the ex-Prom Queen when she wants something." Because the entire thesis of your career as a wife has been, "That'll teach Burt to cross me."

VICKY
That's not fair! Please, Burt, listen...I know, we'll drive out of town and call from a phone booth, okay? I've got change...I've got all kinds of change....

BURT
Don't jive me, Vicky. I'm telling you just this once: don't you jive me anymore today.

VICKY
No jive, Burt. Five minutes. Then little old Vicky Jean is going to put on her boogie shoes.

109 (CONT'D) 109

BURT
I'm going in.

He pushes the door back and goes in.

110 HIGH ANGLE - LONG SHOT FROM TOP OF CHURCH 110

From this distance VICKY is small and vulnerable as a toy doll — the only thing moving on the empty street as she paces nervously back and forth like a trapped insect.

111 VICKY 111

as she glances warily over her shoulder, eyes wide, gives up — and ducks inside.

112 INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - FOLLOWING VICKY 112

VICKY walks carefully down a hallway, her eyes adjusting to the dimness. She touches a wall for support — and listens.

There is a RUSTLING SOUND from beyond another open doorway.

VICKY
B-burt?

She takes a breath and goes forward.

She comes to the open doorway. The RUSTLING is louder. She hesitites, screws up her courage — and steps into the room.

A FIST comes toward her — and stops short.

It is BURT, waiting inside.

BURT
Jesus Christ, babe. I thought —I don't know what I thought. Don't do that again.

She looks around. The production office of the GATLIN CHRONICLE is littered with yellow copy paper which rustles like leaves underfoot. Typewriters are overturned, file cabinets trashed, the face of the electric clock on the wall shattered.

VICKY
My God! It looks like a tornado hit this place. I know they're supposed to have tornadoes in Nebraska—out indoors?

112 (CONT'D) 112

A stringbook is spread across a desk. On the bulletin board are curling newspaper clippings and headlines from the GATLIN CHRONICLE. The most recent is dated 1968.

BURT returns to the stringbook.

BURT
Look at this.

VICKY
I don't have to look at another thing. How much more do you have to see to get the point? There's nothing, no one left in this town, Burt. There's no one to help us. We'll have to—

BURT
Look.

113 CU - PANNING THE PAGES 113

In the stringbook: a collection of wire service news stories dealing with youth unrest in the '60s — student strikes and sit-ins, runaways, communes, free speech demonstrations, alternative lifestyles — all tied together by Viet Nam War protests, draft card burnings, marches on the Capitol. Rock festivals. Drugs. Dropping out. The breakdown of traditional values and authority — the failure of the public school system and the disintegration of the nuclear family.

114 BURT AND VICKY 114

VICKY
God, it's like being in a time capsule. I remember,
(shudders)
I'm glad all that's over and done with. It was a rough time for the whole country, wasn't it? It's a wonder we all lived through it.

BURT
I don't remember, not all of it. I was...somewhere else.

VICKY
Well, I almost wish I'd been somewhere else, instead of Boston. A small town like this — they couldn't have been touched by all that here.

114 (CONT'D) 114

BURT pulls a sheet of paper out of a typewriter upended on the desk.

BURT (skimming fast)
Listen to this.
"September 6, 1968. Religion Page.
CULTS AND THE NEW RELIGION.
Sidebar: Back to God—or the New
Paganism, question mark.
Local church officials are frankly
concerned about the startling
drop-off in attendance at services
here among growing numbers of our
young people. Reverend Entwhistle
of the Gatlin Congregational Church
describes the situation as 'a crisis
of faith that is threatening to
demoralize an entire generation,
unless parents show that they are
again willing to take up the rod...'"
(beat)
Sounds like you wouldn't have
escaped anything here, Vicky.
It must have hit them hard, too.
Not the way it happened in other
places, maybe, but hard just the
same. And they were trying to find
an answer for themselves, when—

VICKY
When what, Burt? What happened?
Oh, Jesus, I don't want to know!
If we stay around here much longer
we just may find out. And then—
(breaking down)
I don't know if I can handle any
more, Burt!

BURT is waffling. He reaches for the phone on the desk, but it is out of order. He hurls it down.

He goes to Vicky and touches her shoulder. Then, slowly at first but with mounting intensity, they are in each other's arms — holding, caressing, comforting, tighter and closer.

VICKY
Tell me we can go now.

BURT
You got it.

115 EXT. ON THE SIDEWALK - BURT AND VICKY - MOVING 115

They walk arm-in-arm back toward the car.

BURT
You're right. There's nothing we can do here...

116 (OMIT) 116

117 EXT. ON THE SIDEWALK - BURT AND VICKY - MOVING 117

BURT
When we get help, I'm going to tell them all about this place, though. I've never seen anything like it. Whatever it was that scared all these people away — someone's got to find out. Someone's got to come back, take pictures, investigate. The State Police, maybe....

They pass the BARBER SHOP.

118 INT. BARBER SHOP - LOOKING OUT AT SIDEWALK 118

From behind the empty chairs — we see Burt and Vicky pass by outside.

119 EXT. ON THE SIDEWALK - BURT AND VICKY - MOVING 119

BURT (trying to calm VICKY)
What I can't understand is how they could pull up stakes and move without anyone knowing. I didn't see any signs outside of town that said, "Welcome to Gatlin, Biggest Little Ghost Town In Nebraska!"

120 ANGLE IN TOWN PARK 120

MOVING IN on a small POOL in the center of the park. Scum and lily pads float on top, but the water is still -- still enough to reveal a SKELETON grinning up at us from the bottom.

121 EXT. ON THE SIDEWALK-NEAR THE CAR-BURT AND VICKY-MOVING 121

BURT
Of course, the lines were down on the way in here. And judging by the road, nobody comes through here anymore — probably not even truckers....

VICKY
Please. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to <u>think</u> about it. I only want to be in a bed in a motel somewhere, and tomorrow this whole horrible business will have been a dream.

BURT's face says that he doesn't think so. He opens the door for her, takes one last look around — all is silent — and climbs in after her.

He starts the car and they move up Main Street, heading out of town.

122 HIGH ANGLE ON THE CAR - FROM TOP OF TOWN HALL 122

The Thunderbird rolls up Main, shifts — and keeps going.

Almost out of sight. Then — the T-Bird BRAKES, hesitates, slams into reverse, and BACKS UP.

123 IN THE CAR 123

VICKY
Honey what are you doing!

BURT
I want to do one more thing -- I want to check the county map and make sure Hemmingford is the place to go. I didn't trust that gas station attendant.

He opens the car door.

VICKY
Burt, please!

BURT
I'll be back in three minutes.

VICKY
Please don't leave me here!

BURT
Lock the doors and roll up the windows. You'll be fine. Just keep your eyes on the street. If you hear or see anything— if you see anyone, anyone at all— I want you to lean on the horn and then start 'er up and haul ass over there by the main steps. I'll come running.

He starts to leave.

(Continued...)

123 (CONT'D) 123

VICKY
Burt?

He leans back in and she kisses him.

He walks away without turning or slowing. She stares after him and begins to cry again silently. She rolls up the windows, pushes the lock buttons.

124 EXT. OUTSIDE THE TOWN HALL 124

BURT approaches the building and climbs the steps to the tall double wooden doors.

A drift of cornhusks on the top step. A corncob crucifix has been hung on each door. He looks at these, then tries the latch. The door swings open. He goes in.

125 IN THE THUNDERBIRD - VICKY 125

She sits uneasily in the middle of the front seat, shooting nervous glances at the Town Hall. As BURT goes in, she lets out a small gasp.
She fumbles in her purse for her cigarettes and lights one up. She has retrieved the corncob crucifix from the back seat and is holding it in her lap with shaking hands.

126 INT. THE TOWN HALL FOYER - BURT 126

BURT is standing in a small foyer between the wooden doors and an inner set of frosted glass. He sees the outline of dark masses through the glass. He pushes through these doors.

SOUND: The echo of his footfalls.

The doors swing shut behind him.

127 INT. A HALLWAY 127

Shadowy and silent. Straight ahead is a STAIRWAY. On the left wall, a BULLETIN BOARD. On the right, another door with a frosted glass panel and the words:
GATLIN BUREAU OF REGISTRATION DEEDS DOG OFFICER

BURT
Hello! Anybody here?

No answer. He turns to the BULLETIN BOARD.

128 THE BULLETIN BOARD 128

The most prominent item on the board is an old poster:

OLD-FASHION REVIVAL MEETING COME TO THE TENT IN SOMERS MEADOW HEAR REV. CARL BRUCKNER ON "CORN, DROUGHT AND THE WILL OF GOD" HEAR LILY TREMONT THE SINGING MARVEL PLUS THE "GOSPEL SIX" PRAISE GOD ONLY GOD CAN BRING RAIN SEPT 1-3, 1968 FROM 7:30 TO ?

Also a poster for a Grange Supper, August 29, 1968... town notices...a Bloodmobile schedule...etc. All yellowed, fragile-looking.

129 ON BURT 129

BURT
(to himself)
The corn. What is all this crap about the corn?

He turns — goes to the door marked GATLIN BUREAU OF REGISTRATION — starts to open it —

130 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD - LONG SHOT 130

The Thunderbird parked by itself. The shape of VICKY in the middle of the front seat.

SOUND: From a distance — very faintly — THE HUMMING.

131 THE TOWN PARK 131

The small pond seen earlier — and next to it a copse of dusty bushes.

MALACHAI, ISAAC and three other BOYS come through the bushes. All are armed — with a butcher knife, a cleaver, an axe, a very long screwdriver.

They move forward and stop.

132 LONG SHOT THE THUNDERBIRD - THE BOYS' POV 132

From several hundred feet away. From here the T-Bird looks very small, very vulnerable.

133 ON THE BOYS 133

MALACHAI holds up his butcher knife and touches the wooden haft to his forehead in a ritualistic gesture.

MALACHAI
Does God speak to you, Isaac?

133 (CONT'D) 133

ISAAC
He speaks to me always, Malachai —but on this matter he has already spoken. We must kill the interlopers.

MALACHAI
The will of God be done.

OTHERS
Amen.

They walk forward, crouched.

134 EXT. AN ALLEY 134

Looking directly into a brick-throated alleyway.

Here are FOUR OTHER BOYS — also armed with rude weapons. One of them is holding a pony-sledge hammer.

135 ANOTHER ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD - FROM THE ALLEY 135

Two blocks away. The pony-sledge hammer comes into frame, POINTING at the car.

136 ANOTHER ANGLE ON T-BIRD — FROM TOWN HALL ROOF 136

In the background, just behind the car, is a HEDGE. Behind the hedge we can see two or three other BOYS.

137 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 137

VICKY in profile. In the background, the HEDGE the boys are hiding behind.

ANGLING to include the rearview mirror. IN THE MIRROR we see FOUR MORE BOYS run behind the car from right to left.

VICKY looks up a split-second after they pass.

VICKY
(whispering)
Burt, goddam you, come on.

138 INT. THE GATLIN TOWN OFFICE 138

A standard office, dusty and long-deserted, divided by a waist-high partition with built-in clerks' windows. The clerks' side of this partition is a shambles — equipment overturned, papers scattered, cornhusks everywhere.

BURT takes this all in with growing bewilderment. Then he looks up at the far wall — and his eyes widen.

139 THE TOWN OFFICE WALL - BURT'S POV 139

The wall is dominated by the strangest PORTRAIT OF CHRIST ever seen -- resembling Lon Chaney in The Phantom of the Opera more than anything else. Christ is grinning and he has green hair -- but it is not hair at all. It is twined corn plants.

140 THE TOWN OFFICE - FOLLOWING BURT 140

He goes to his left and lets himself through the partition's swing-gate for a closer look at the picture.

SOUND: CRUNCHING GLASS underfoot.

BURT looks down. A picture is lying face down on the floor in a spray of glass from the frame. BURT picks it up. It is the "official" portrait of LBJ, the obligatory Presidential photo that hangs in all government buildings.

BURT looks from LBJ to the strange portrait of Jesus. Then he tosses LBJ away and walks back through the gate. He pauses for a moment thoughtfully, then crosses to the frosted glass door to the hall.

He opens it and goes out.

141 CU - THE PICTURE OF JESUS 141

Holding on the portrait, then PANNING to the window.

Slowly, one by one, THREE YOUNG MEN look in and scan the empty office. They hold a whispered conversation, then move off right.

142 INT. THE TOWN HALL CORRIDOR - FOLLOWING BURT 142

He is deciding whether to leave now or explore further.

He turns right and goes down the hallway. His eyes are everywhere -- like a hunter, like a soldier on patrol.

BURT considers the stairs, then turns to the directory.

143 CU - THE BUILDING DIRECTORY 143

1st Floor: TOWN REGISTRATION OFFICE DEEDS AUTO TAXES
DOG OFFICER FISHING-HUNTING LICENSES

143 (CONT'D) 143

2nd Floor: COUNTY ROAD SYSTEM AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES
GATLIN POLICE DEPT. OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

MOVING IN on: GATLIN POLICE DEPT.

144 IN THE CORRIDOR 144

Nothing.

He goes to the stairs and pauses at the bottom. Then — he runs up, silently.

At the other end of the corridor is a chickenwire glass FIRE DOOR. Unseen by BURT — the SAFETY BOLT is thrown, LOCKING THE DOOR.

145 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 145

VICKY is staring through the windshield at the Town Hall.

IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR — ANOTHER BOY CROSSES behind the car.

VICKY's eyes jerk up -- this time she's almost seen it. She turns to the back window.

Main Street stretches empty and deserted behind the car.

VICKY opens the car door.

146 EXT. THE THUNDERBIRD 146

She gets out and stands frightened and vulnerable, scenting danger.

But when she sees nothing, she tries to force herself to relax. She turns back to the car —

SOUND: The LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN.

She wheels around in all directions.

VICKY
Who's there?

No answer.

PANNING to include town: the Town Hall, the hedge, a deserted Dairy Treet — then straight down the barrel of Main Street and the newspaper office, the barber shop, the Bar and Grill, the Bijou, the little park, finally out to the horizon where the corn takes over again.

Nothing moving out there, chief...at least, nothing we can see.

146 (CONT'D) 146

BACK TO VICKY as she breathes hard, her eyes cutting from side to side.

VICKY
Now somebody's out there, because I heard you! Whoever you are, stop playing games!

No answer.

She begins stepping nervously toward the Town Hall.

FOUR YOUNG MEN come around the building's far corner and face her. MALACHAI is one of them. All are armed — and smiling happily, blissed-out.

VICKY
Who are you?

MALACHAI
(pleasantly)
Your destiny, woman.

VICKY backs up.

Behind her, THREE MORE BOYS bull their way through the hedge and stand there.

MORE BOYS are coming out of the park, from the mouth of the alley...twenty or thirty altogether. All smiling.

VICKY turns and sees them all. She is paralyzed with fear.

MALACHAI
(sympathetically)
Would you like to pray?

VICKY
P-pray?

MALACHAI
(kindly)
The time of forgiveness is almost over for you, woman. The time of judgement is at hand. Hell yawns below you.

VICKY stares around wildly.

147 EXT. GATLIN - VICKY'S POV 147

Now they are coming from everywhere. All boys, all armed. Average age fifteen. FIFTY or SIXTY of them.

SOUND: The HUMMING.

148 VICKY - WIDE 148

MALACHAI and his group are joined by three younger boys from the hedge. The seven of them stand between her and the Town Hall — between her and BURT.

She tenses, preparing to run for it.

MALACHAI motions with both hands and the other six spread out in a skirmish line. They join in the humming.

VICKY screams — and runs back to the Thunderbird.

BOY
Malachai, what about the man?

MALACHAI
(eagerly)
God has provided the woman first.

They move in.

149 INT. THE THIRD FLOOR LANDING - WITH BURT 149

He's still tight, pumped up, completely alert. Dark patches of sweat have appeared under his arms and down the back of his shirt.

This corridor is quite short, ending at a heavily-reinforced window marked FIRE ESCAPE.

Only two doors: to the left, the GATLIN POLICE DEPT.
SAMUEL CROSS, CHIEF
To the right: OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
JOHN D. REESE

BURT hesitates, then goes down the hall for one last look. He tries the Police Dept. door — and lunges in.

150 ANGLES ON OTHER DOORS - MONTAGE 150

as one by one every door Burt has gone through is swiftly LOCKED by unseen hands.

151 INT. POLICE DEPT. OFFICE 151

BURT gives a low whistle.

Some big-time wrecking went on in here once upon a time.

Yellowed cornhusks everywhere.

On one wall, this message written in white paint:
THUS LET THE INIQUITOUS BE CUT DOWN SO THAT THE GROUND MAY BE FERTILE AGAIN THUS SAITH HE WHO WALKS BEHIND THE ROWS.

151 (CONT'D) 151

BURT
Cut down? What the hell does that--

He breaks off. He is studying the slogan which is written in childish, struggling letters.

BURT
(disbelief)
Sacrifice?

152 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 152

VICKY is crazy with fear. She hits the car horn — nothing!

VICKY
The keys, the keys! Have to turn the key on!

She fumbles for the keys — and drops them on the floorboard.

153 INT. POLICE DEPT. OFFICE 153

BURT is staring with an expression of dawning horror. He looks around the trashed office. His eyes settle again on the words painted on the wall.

BURT
Iniquitous. Iniquitous...

He goes to the wall. On the floor is another corncob crucifix. He picks it up.

154 EXT. THE THUNDERBIRD 154

The boys are gathering, circling the car. They REACH OUT, CLASP HANDS, forming a loose ring around the T-Bird.

In the car, VICKY is panicked.

155 INT. POLICE DEPT. OFFICE 155

BURT still kneeling with the corncob crucifix. Also in this corner is a bashed-in police radio — and next to it a dispatch sheet intended for reading on the air. BURT reaches for it.

BURT
(reading)
Police car burned...shotgun murder, two boys sought... couple found poisoned...a lynching in the park...

155 (CONT'D) 155

BURT (CONT'D)
...and all on the same night
...September 6th...1968...
all killed...

156 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 156

As the circle of youngsters closes in on the car.

157 INT. POLICE DEPT. OFFICE 157

BURT
...killed...they killed them.
They killed...the defilers of
the corn? That's insane...!

SOUND: A CAR HORN outside.

BURT looks up.

158 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 158

VICKY's hands have found the keys and the horn. She is BEATING out blasts.

VICKY
BURT! Oh God, Burt!

WIDER to see her crouched behind the wheel, nearly insane with terror, trying to look twenty different ways at once.

They are HUMMING, closing in. One of them reaches the driver's window — MALACHAI.

159 INT. POLICE DEPT OFFICE 159

BURT rushes to the chickenwire window and looks out.

BURT
Vicky. Jesus Christ.

He races to the door.

160 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD - WIDE 160

The circle around the car is tight now. Abruptly they all drop hands, cutting off the humming with the slapping SOUND of their palms striking their thighs. Their smiles click off like lightbulbs.

Then — silence.

161 BURT - MOVING 161

as he charges down the stairs and tries first one door, then another in the hallway -- ALL LOCKED!

162 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 162

VICKY is facing MALACHAI through the closed side window.

VICKY
What do you want? His body?
So you can cover it up? Take it!
Go on, it's in the trunk!

MALACHAI
(through glass)
The trunk is locked.

VICKY
Here I'll give you the keys!
No, wait, I'll open it for you!
Is that what you--?

MALACHAI
We don't want his body, sister.

VICKY
(screams)
I am not your sister!

MALACHAI
(compassionately)
We only want to give you peace.

He presses his face to the glass, distorting it. Then he takes a step back -- and PLUNGES THE KNIFE into the glass, shattering it. VICKY is covered with safety glass as MALACHAI hacks away, lunging through for her throat. VICKY recoils and the knife buries itself in her shoulder.

VICKY screams in agony as blood stains her blue work-shirt.

163 BURT - MOVING 163

BURT is pelting down the next stairs two by two. He shoulders into the first emergency exit, the next, the next. All are locked.

He runs for the outer doors.

164 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 164

as the OTHERS rush in.

165 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 165

VICKY is fighting a losing battle for her life. She screams continuously, wet with blood. Her hands continue to beat at the horn. It bleats like an animal.

FACES peer in at every window. One BOY leaps up onto the hood and raises a hammer over the windshield.

VICKY manages to turn the key and start the engine. She drops into Drive and the Thunderbird lurches forward. Children are clinging to the hood and she cannot see. She spins the steering wheel wildly with her one good hand and the car banks madly, throwing children to the street.

She continues to SCREAM as she tromps the gas pedal and roars out.

A THUMP and LURCH as she rolls over TWO BODIES.

Now the children are shouting too. VICKY can't see. The car careens insanely and fishtails over the curbing and into the park -- where it CRASHES into a giant oak tree.

The horn bleats are winding down as VICKY drifts off, losing blood, in shock...

166 BURT - MOVING - IN THE FOYER 166

as he BURSTS through the frosted glass doors and slams his shoulder into the big wooden doors to the outside.

The door are solid and won't move.

He kicks in a FIRE BOX and grabs an emergency AXE. He stands back and SWINGS it into the wood.

167 ANGLE ON THUNDERBIRD 167

as children converge on the wrecked car. One BOY jumps up onto the hood with a sledge and swings it into the windshield. The window shatters. The horn stops.

CHILD'S VOICE
Let's rock it!

They begin to rock the Thunderbird back and forth.

168 IN THE THUNDERBIRD 168

VICKY flops back and forth like a rag doll.

168 (CONT'D) 168

The car is rocking more and more. The SOUND of crunching glass and overtaxed springs.

MALACHAI
Now! Heave, for God's love!

The Thunderbird crashes over on its side, and the boys let out a spontaneous CHEER.

169 EXT. THE WINDOWS OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH 169

ANGLE IN through the clear bottom halves of the stained glass windows, which are crowded with YOUNG GIRLS in high-necked linsey-woolsey dresses. Most are plain, but two or three are pretty in a countrified way. Two or three are also pregnant.

Anxious faces — but when they hear the boys CHEER they react with happiness and relief, chattering excitedly.

170 THE DESTRUCTION OF THE THUNDERBIRD 170

Hammers rise and fall, smashing the Thunderbird's back window. A sledgehammer smashes a headlight into powder.

SOUNDS of destruction. Cheers and babble.

VICKY is yanked out of the car, dead or unconscious. A half-dozen BOYS bear her away.

171 EXT. THE TOWN HALL 171

as BURT chops through and BURSTS out onto the steps, out of breath, wide-eyed, unbelieving.

BURT
(full force)
STOP!!

172 THE THUNDERBIRD AND THE BOYS 172

THE BOYS stop shouting and smashing. A pool of gasoline is forming below the Bird's ruptured gas tank. One by one the boys turn around — all forty or fifty of them.

MALACHAI is in the foreground, holding his butcher knife, which is dripping with Vicky's blood.

173 WIDER - TO INCLUDE TOWN HALL STEPS 173

BURT faces the boys down.

Complete SILENCE.

173 (CONT'D) 173

After a moment of impasse, MALACHAI produces a single wooden match from his pocket. He uses his thumbnail to pop it, his eyes never leaving BURT's.

BURT makes an abortive move forward, then stops. Too many.

BURT
Don't! My wife is in there!

MALACHAI
No more, brother.

MALACHAI tosses the match into the pool of gas. The car goes up in a fireball as the others move away.

174 HIGH ANGLE - ALL OF GATLIN 174

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW of the entire town. From this distance it looks toylike and peaceful...except for a column of black SMOKE rising ominously against the blue...and the fire down below in the town square.

175 WIDE - BURT AND THE BOYS 175

BURT
(unbelieving)
You've killed her?

The car blazes brightly. MALACHAI takes six or eight steps toward BURT. The others begin to move in behind him.

MALACHAI stands, gazing at BURT. He begins to smile. The others smile, too...those goofy, blissed-out grins. Then MALACHAI raises the bloody KNIFE and makes a sawing motion at his throat. The smile is replaced by an expression of fierce hate.

MALACHAI
KILL THE INTERLOPER!

The BOYS rush forward, yelling for blood, but still incongruously cheerful...like high-spirited children.

176 THE STEPS AND THE CHARGING BOYS - BURT'S POV 176

The BOYS rush at BURT, brandishing their weapons, closing the distance.

BURT turns to face the building and we SLAM through the doors into the foyer — then through the broken, frosted-glass inner doors and into the first-floor corridor.

RUNNING back up the hall toward the stairs.

SOUND: BURT'S BREATHING - AMPLIFIED - throughout.

177 EXT. THE TOWN HALL WALK AND STEPS 177

The BOYS stream across the parking lot, the lawn and up the steps, rushing inside -- pushing and shoving at the entrance, which slows them down a bit.

178 ANGLE ON MALACHAI 178

MALACHAI and two other older boys remain behind.

MOVING IN on them as the car burns in the background.

MALACHAI
Go around to the back of the building and make sure he doesn't use the fire escape.

MALACHAI smiles peacefully as they trot off. Everything is going well; everything is four-oh.

179 INT. THE TOWN HALL STAIRWELL 179

Looking straight down the stairwell from the top of the building. BURT is toiling up the stairs. Below, the BOYS are just starting up

180 ON THE STAIRS - BURT'S POV 180

UP the flight of stairs.

AT the second floor -- looking down the hallway. The Police Dept. door (open) on the left. The Mayor's Office door (closed) on the right. PANNING from left to right -- and ZOOMING IN on the single dusty window at the end of the corridor and the sign:

FIRE ESCAPE

SOUND: Echoing FOOTFALLS as the boys start up the last flight.

MOVING swiftly down the hall to the window. Through the dusty reinforced glass we see a rusty FIRE ESCAPE leading down the side of the building. BURT'S HANDS come up, fumble at the window, and at last force it open. The window hasn't been used in twelve years or more.

SOUND: MANY FOOTFALLS approaching -- LOUDER.

TURNING to look back down the hall. Nothing in sight yet. But it won't be long.

Back to the FIRE ESCAPE - MOVING FORWARD. BURT's leg enters the shot as he swings it over the sill and onto the platform.

MOVING OUT through the open window.

180 (CONT'D) 180

VOICE
There he is!

LOOKING BACK IN at the BOYS crowding the hallway. One of them throws a KNIFE.

181 EXT. THE FIRE ESCAPE 181

The fire escape is at the rear of the building. It makes a large rusty Z down to a back ALLEY lined with garbage cans. TWO BOYS sent by MALACHAI are back here, looking up.

BURT is hurrying down the fire escape, moving fast.

182 THE FIRE ESCAPE - BURT'S POV 182

as he reaches the fire escape's second floor landing, starts down again -- and STOPS.

The TWO BOYS are waiting below, craning their necks.

SOUND: A CLANG - as something strikes the rusty fire escape and bounces off.

An open POCKET KNIFE lands near BURT's feet, then falls through the open grating.

LOOKING BACK AND UP: the BOYS are spilling out onto the fire escape, some starting down, some clogged in the window, pushing and shoving, some THROWING objects at Burt. All are still grinning, exuberant, sure of the ultimate outcome.

BURT looks DOWN at the TWO BOYS who block his escape on the ground. Then he looks UP again. He easily dodges a thrown knife, then a screwdriver. His choice seems clear: two below, close on fifty above.

BURT starts down the last flight. It ends at a platform about seven feet off the ground. He stops, just about a foot over the heads of the two waiting boys.

The TWO BOYS drop back a couple of steps, nervous and excited, waiting for him to jump.

BURT
I can take you. Don't make me prove it.

FIRST BOY
God is my strength.

182 (CONT'D) 182

BURT
That's what they told us in the Forces, too. Now don't make me—

KNIVES and TOOLS start to shower down again. BURT looks up. The boys in the lead have reached the second floor landing.

BURT looks back down. Measures the distance. And JUMPS.

183 THE ALLEY - BURT'S POV 183

SOUND: BURT'S breathing, amplified - continuing.

as he lands in back of the TWO BOYS. They turn and rush him with clumsy eagerness, swinging their knives.

BURT
HEEEEE-YAH!

His right foot comes up and kicks the FIRST BOY in the solar plexus. The FIRST BOY's expression changes from eagerness to pain and total lack of belief — this isn't the way things are supposed to go in Gatlin. The knife flies from his hand and he starts to fold up.

BURT
EEEEE-YAH!

BURT'S hand slices down and catches the FIRST BOY at the top of his nose, right between the eyes. BLOOD explodes from his nostrils.

BURT swings to the left just in time to see the SECOND BOY, who has moved into range. The SECOND BOY's knife is coming down fast. BURT's hand comes up and blocks the thrust. The SECOND BOY is forced back a step. Now Burt's foot enters the frame, and he kicks the SECOND BOY squarely in the family jewels.

BURT
YEEEEAHHH!

The SECOND BOY screams and clutches at himself and begins to backpedal, the knife flying from his hand.

184 ANGLE IN ALLEY - WITH BURT 184

The FIRST BOY lies almost at Burt's feet, not moving. The SECOND BOY is huddled in the alley, moaning.

BURT stares at them, checking his work, and then he moves back a step or two. And looks up.

185 THE FIRE ESCAPE 185

The other boys have stopped. They look stunned by the unexpected result of the fight. Then we see dawning anger. One of them — ISAAC — moves in front of MALACHAI and forward to the railing of the second floor landing. He has what looks like a paring knife, and speaks in a loud, childish shout.

ISAAC
My name is ISAAC, Chosen of He Who Walks Behind the Rows, Seer and Prophet and Guardian of the Corn! Let my aim be true if it is Thy will!

He lets fly.

186 THE ALLEY - WITH BURT 186

BURT is still looking up as the knife strikes him in the upper arm and goes in to the hilt. Blood stains his shirt.

The boys on the fire escape stare down, stunned, not moving. They are all eyes. Only ISAAC does not register surprise. He wears an expression of smug self-righteousness.

BURT looks down unbelievingly at the knife buried in his arm. He touches it. Winces. Touches it again.

BURT
Look what you've done to my arm, you little bastard!

ISAAC comes down three steps.

ISAAC
(confidently)
You are a sinner. You are a defiler of the corn. It will do you no good to curse me. Bow to the will of God.

BURT
What have you done to Vicky? Is she dead?

ISAAC
It was the will of God that she should die.

BURT
You enjoyed it.

ISAAC
The Lord loveth a cheerful heart and a glad countenance.

186 (CONT'D) 186

BURT
Watch. All of you.

He draws the knife out of his arm, slowly, and with a grimace of pain. There is the SOUND of a muted, uneasy GASP from the boys on the fire escape. BURTS holds the knife out before them and snaps it in two. He drops it at his feet.

BURT
You better have more than a few paring knives and screwdrivers, kiddies. Better hunt up a few flame-throwers. This is my game. I've played it before. And on better courts than yours.

ISAAC
The Lord is not mocked—

BURT
Neither am I, sonny. I'm getting out of here now. And I'm going to tell people what's going on here. I don't think they'll believe me, not at first. I don't believe it myself. But I'll get it across to them eventually. You...you kids... you all belong in a loony-bin somewhere. Where are your parents?

No answer. The boys all look nervous now — and a little guilty. All, that is, except ISAAC, who only looks angry and sulky. By removing the knife from his arm and breaking it, Burt has topped his trick.

BURT
(barks)
I asked you a question!
Where are your parents?

ISAAC
In the corn.

BURT
What?

ISAAC
Kill him! Kill the interloper!

186 (CONT'D) 186

For a moment there is a pause, dead air...perhaps the others have been too cowed to go on with this. It is clear that they are not at all used to having things run counter to their plans, and that the events of the last few minutes have set them back badly.

Then, screaming and yelling, led by ISAAC, they RUSH down the fire escape toward Burt.

BURT turns and flees down the alley.

As he reaches the end, the first of the boys are leaping off the platform and giving chase. ISAAC remains below the fire escape, watching.

187 THE MOUTH OF THE ALLEY 187

as BURT emerges onto Main Street. He stands undecided, looking from one direction to the other. Left is downtown Gatlin. Right is out of town.

He turns right, goes about four steps, and then a lot of the BOYS — maybe two dozen — burst out between a Feed and Grain store and a tool and die shop, blocking his way. He wheels around and runs down the Main Street sidewalk. Seconds later the boys who blocked the way out of town and the boys from the alley join forces and run after him.

188 MAIN STREET - BURT'S POV 188

SOUND: The steady SLAP of his FEET on the sidewalk, the panting of his breathing, harsh and amplified.

RUNNING past the places he and Vicky passed on their way in: the Bar and Grill, the movie house, the newspaper office, the barber shop...

As he passes the town park, ANOTHER GROUP OF BOYS — only four or five this time — rush out at him. BURT SWERVES and straight-arms one of them. The BOY flies backward in a heap on the sidewalk. BURT runs on.

He reaches the last building on Main Street proper — a billiard parlor with smashed windows. The sidewalk ends. BURT turns left onto a sidestreet, a short dead-end with a few houses on each side...then a vacant lot...then the CORN.

LOOKING BACK — the BOYS have gained a little.

AHEAD AGAIN as BURT reaches the end of the sidestreet's pavement — and falls into a ditch.

189 THE DITCH 189

BURT scrambles to his knees and regains his feet. The upper right arm of his shirt, where the knife went in, is dark with blood. He looks back over his shoulder.

190 THE PURSUING BOYS 190

Closer than ever. Yelling and screaming, but it doesn't have that boyish campers-on-a-snipe hunt sound anymore. They are mad as hell.

191 THE DITCH 191

BURT scrambles up the far side of the ditch and starts across the vacant lot as if, in the words of Charlie Daniels, his head was on fire and his ass was catching.

The BOYS leap the ditch, some falling, most making it easily. They are younger and fresher than burt. The closest are no more than fifty feet behind him now.

192 BELOW THE FIRE ESCAPE 192

ISAAC is staring down the now-deserted alleyway.

He looks up at the SOUND of feet on the fire escape, and MALACHAI joins him by leaping lightly to the ground.

MALACHAI
He...he's hurt David and Mark!

ISAAC
(cooly)
Mark's dead.

MALACHAI
Praise God.

Silence for a moment. When ISAAC speaks again, his voice is strange and fey. His eyes are far away. He seems hypnotized, transported.

ISAAC
(low)
The Lord is displeased with you as our leader.

MALACHAI
What? Why...?

ISAAC
First Joseph, killed in the corn instead of in the place of sacrifice. Then the man and the woman came.

192 (CONT'D) 192

MALACHAI
They'll catch him—

ISAAC
It doesn't matter if they do or not. The Lord guided my aim ...but no to his heart, only to his arm. And he took the knife out and broke it. Broke it in two. It was a sign, Malachai.

MALACHAI
A sign from a sinner? An interloper? One of those from the outside where they do not know He Who Walks Behind the Rows?

ISAAC
The clay knoweth not the potter's work. All things do the work of God, even the sinners, though they know it not. He broke the knife as we broke our Covenant with God when you allowed Joseph to be killed in the corn.

MALACHAI
But he was getting away!

ISAAC
Your faith weakened. You've led the Children four years now. Perhaps you've gone prideful and this is your punishment. He Who Walks Behind the Rows is a jealous God; he was old when Jesus was unborn. He is a God of favor, but he is a God of sacrifice as well.

MALACHAI
(fearful)
But Isaac—

ISAAC raises his hand and MALACHAI hushes up immediately.

ISAAC
But he is a God of sacrifice as well. For what other reason has he allowed us to survive, unseen and unknown, for all these years while the world outside grows ever more wicked? God has shielded us with His hand...with the hand of He Who Walk Behind the Rows. When He speaks to me, Malachai...will you accept his will?

192 (CONT'D) 192

MALACHAI
(hoarse with fear)
Yes! Praise God!

ISAAC
(complacently)
Let us pray.

They drop to their knees in the alley, bow their heads in silence. Then ISAAC looks up. MALACHAI's head remains bowed, his eyes tightly closed...squinched shut after the manner of children.

ISAAC
He will go into the corn.

MALACHAI
Like Joseph?

ISAAC
Yes. Like Joseph.

193 THE VACANT LOT - BURT'S POV 193

RUNNING toward the corn.

SOUND: BURT's gasping breath — amplified.

194 ANGLE ON BURT 194

As BURT approaches the corn, he kicks off his shoes. Then he plunges in and is gone.

The others approach but don't enter the corn. They won't even get too close. They're scared of it.

A BOY
What do we do now?

SECOND BOY
Malachai and Isaac. Someone has to find Malachai and Isaac. They'll know.

THIRD BOY
Look at Nahum!

They all turn, and several move aside so that we can see a BOY of about nine. He is down on one knee, stabbing one of Burt's cast-off shoes.

195 THE EDGE OF THE VACANT LOT 195

The BOY, NAHUM, is grinning fixedly and humming, stabbing again and again at Burt's shoe, which is already in ribbons, with a huge butcher knife. The strokes are mechanical, chillingly robotic.

196 IN THE CORN - BURT'S POV 196

RUNNING straight down one of the rows. Like the highway, the row seems to go all the way to the horizon, straight as a string, and then to dwindle to a point. It is very green in here, very mysterious.

SOUND: With BURT's breathing, the RUSTLE and SLAP of the leaves against his arms and shoulders.

He STOPS and looks back. The row is deserted.

LOOKING FORWARD as we begin to move again.

197 THE VACANT LOT 197

All of the boys are gathered here in a loose semi-circle, facing ISAAC and MALACHAI, who stand together with their backs to the corn. There is a dead silence.

MALACHAI
There is a defiler of the corn.

A rustle of agreement from the boys.

MALACHAI (CONT'D)
An interloper.

The rustle again.

ISAAC
He must be caught...but not killed until he is brought to the clearing of the Blue Man.

OTHERS
The Blue Man...the Blue Man...

ISAAC
A defiler of the corn indeed! As was the Blue Man. As were the parents. The story of their iniquity has been shewn to me, even as it has been passed among you in stories and legends of times long passed....

198 EXT. LIGHTED CLOCK IN WINDOW NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 198

The clock gives off an eerie flourescent glow, and written around the outside rim is: GATLIN JEWELRY STORE SERVING CENTRAL NEBRASKA SINCE 1926. It is a few minutes past midnight.

Under the clock is a calendar: Sept. 6, 1968.

SOUND: Crickets.

199 TOTAL BLACKNESS (FLASHBACK) 199

SOUND: Snoring.

Then, a CREAKING. Muted light spills into the frame as a door opens. Two small BOYS — ages ten and twelve — stand in the doorway. They are holding shotguns. They look happy...blissed-out and exalted.

WIDER as they walk into the room. Now, in the foreground, we see their PARENTS sleeping in a double bed. The two BOYS raise the SHOTGUNS. There is a deafening BLAST and the sleeping PARENTS jerk in their bed — the bedclothes shred as we:

CUT TO:

200 (OMIT) 200

201 EXT. POND IN TOWN PARK NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 201

FROGS and CRICKETS in the background. And a SLOW CREAKING —a ROPE on wood.

WIDER to see a CORPSE dangling from the end of a rope. The rope's other end is thrown over a branch jutting over the pond.

201 (CONT'D) 201

There are several YOUNG PEOPLE gathered around the base of this hanging tree. One YOUNG MAN edges out on the limb and cuts the rope. The body drops into the pond.

SOUND: Slow BUBBLING from the pond.

YOUNG MAN IN TREE
Praise God!

OTHERS
Amen!

CUT TO:

202 INT. A LARGE CONSOLE TV - CU NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 202

A SLEDGE-HAMMER comes down and impacts the TV screen. There is a SLOW-MOTION EXPLOSION, glass flying everywhere.

203 INT. A STEREO COMPONENT SET-UP - CU NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 203

TWO SLEDGE-HAMMERS come down in SLOW MOTION, one utterly destroying the turntable, the other pounding the pre-amp to junk. They come down again, blasting holes through both speakers.

204 INT. A LIVING ROOM NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 204

TWO BOYS approach the shattered console TV. There is a window giving on Gatlin's Main Street in the background, and through it we can see YOUNG PEOPLE all moving in one direction. They are all HUMMING as they carry TVs, stereos, radios.

The TWO BOYS carry the TV to the door.

MOVING WITH THEM to see a MAN sitting bolt-upright in a La-Z-Boy recliner. Dead.

His lap is full of CORNSTALKS.

The BOYS pass him and go out with the TV -- they don't even spare the dead man a glance.

CUT TO:

205 EXT. GATLIN POLICE DEPT. EMBLEM NIGHT (FLASHBACK) 205

A GOLD DECAL with the words GATLIN POLICE DEPT.

SOUND: Many VOICES singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with great vigor.

205 (CONT'D) 205

WIDER to see that the EMBLEM is on a POLICE CAR that is full of rock and roll record albums. Several BOYS AND GIRLS come up and throw in more — smiling, singing, blissed-out.

CONTINUING WIDER to see that the police car is parked on the lawn of the Town Hall. MORE KIDS shuttle to and fro, throwing albums into the car, books as well. After a few moments a BOY approaches the car with a GAS CAN. He pours gas in through the open windows.

He stands back, lights a match, and throws it in. The police car becomes a torch. The children CHEER—

HIGHER until the car is a single flaming light in the darkness. Faintly we hear the children yelling and crying with victory —

206 THE VACANT LOT - AS BEFORE THE PRESENT 206

CHILDREN
The Blue Man...He Who Walks Behind the Rows...

ISAAC
This, then, is the word of God. The interloper must be caught and taken to the clearing of the Blue Man. There he must be sacrificed. Only then will the Covenant be restored.

BOY
(excited)
Let's go!

At once the crowd begins to move in a bolt toward the corn, their fears gone — this has, after all, been sanctified by their "elders."

But as they start to move, ISAAC raises his hand. They STOP, looking at him attentively. But ISAAC looks at MALACHAI, handing the ball back to him.

MALACHAI
First we'll have a hymn. And a prayer.

VOICE
Yes, Malachai, hallelujah!

OTHERS
Hallelujah!

206 (CONT'D) 206

MALACHAI begins to sing a capella:

MALACHAI
Sowing in the morning...
Sowing seeds of kindness...
Sowing in the noontide...
And the dewy eve...

ISAAC joins in, then the others. They stand there singing "Bringing in the Sheaves" in reverant if out-of-tune voices.

207 IN THE CORN - WITH BURT 207

BURT is jogging up a row. Now he hears the SINGING behind him and stops, cocking his head. Faintly, cut by the distance, we hear "Bringing in the Sheaves," continuing.

BURT
(mutters)
Sing on, you assholes.

He sinks to his knees. He is pale and sweaty, but in control ...in a weird kind of way, he might even be enjoying this. He puts his head back, closes his eyes and rests for a moment.

Then he rips open his shirt to look at the wound on his arm. He prepares to put a quick fix on it, using a piece of the shirt as a bandage -- when there is a faint CHEER from behind. He looks around, gets to his feet again.

BURT
Camp-meeting's done, huh?
Come on, then.

He runs on up the row.

208 HIGH ANGLE - OVER CORNFIELD 208

EXTREME RIGHT we see the verge of the vacant lot marking the edge of the corn. The BOYS are running down the rows, and we can hear them calling faintly back and forth. The corn is so high that the boys in adjacent rows can't see each other, but can hear each other clearly. FROM ABOVE they appear to be running in parallel green-bordered slots.

209 IN THE CORN - FRONT ANGLE ON BURT 209

He runs up -- stops -- listens. After a moment he hears VOICES, but they aren't close enough to be menacing. We can only hear what the THREE CLOSEST VOICES are saying:

FIRST VOICE
Hey, this is my row!

209 (CONT'D) 209

SECOND VOICE
No, Daniel and I were here first.

THIRD VOICE
That's right, John.

BURT smiles a little at this. He trots off again, but not with his former urgency. His panic is totally gone now. He goes about forty feet down the row he's in, and then cuts through the corn to the next one. MOVING WITH HIM as he zigzags through the corn, hopscotching rows.

He runs on out of sight.

Only the corn, rustling secretly. Then a VERY YOUNG BOY about eight comes into frame, crying.

ANOTHER BOY, about fourteen, steps through the corn to join him. The YOUNG BOY hears the rustling, starts fearfully, and then sees who it is and runs to him to be comfort-hugged.

PETER
(concerned)
Daniel, why are you crying?

DANIEL only cries harder.

PETER
Daniel?

DANIEL
I saw His shadow! I saw it!

PETER reacts sharply, looking around.

PETER
The man? Where?

DANIEL
Not him! He Who Walks Behind the Rows!

PETER's face grows stern -- perhaps a little frightened. He grasps Daniel's shoulder tight enough to make the little boy squirm and cry out.

PETER
That's blasphemy!

DANIEL
But I did, Peter! I did see it! I saw His shadow!

209 (CONT'D) 209

PETER lets go of DANIEL's shoulder, and now the fourteen-year-old looks a bit uncertain himself.

PETER
I...I don't believe it.

DANIEL
I was back there, just walking up the row, looking for the sinner...or more of his footprints ...only I didn't see any footprints because the ground's all hard and sorta powdery...

PETER
(impatiently)
I know.

DANIEL
And all of a sudden it got dark on my one side and I looked over... and it was like the sun was out on that side...and I could hear something ...walking...breathing...and the shadow came up on the corn...
(whimpering)
I couldn't catch my breath...I thought he was coming for me...because Joseph was my friend...it was He Who Walks Behind the Rows...<u>oh Peter, He passed right by me</u>...!

DANIEL throws himself into the arms of the older boy. PETER holds him, staring with wide eyes over Daniel's head into the corn...as if expecting to see the same shadow and feel the same presence...

PETER
(shakily)
You've had a vision, Daniel. You're very lucky. If it's true.

DANIEL
I swear it! I swear it is!

PETER
Maybe you'll be the next Prophet. When Isaac reaches the Age of Favor.

DANIEL
(whimpering)
I don't want to be a prophet. I just want--

209 (CONT'D) 209

PETER
Don't blaspheme!

DANIEL shudders and says nothing for a moment. Then:

DANIEL
It's three o'clock by the sun.

PETER
Yes.

DANIEL
(in a rush)
We won't stay after dark, will we? If we don't find the man? We won't stay in the corn, will we?

PETER
(grim)
We'll find him.

DANIEL
But if we don't?

PETER
(pause)
We never stay in the corn after dark. You know that. It...isn't wise.

DANIEL
(whispers)
Because of Him.

PETER
Yes.
(pause)
Because of Him.

DANIEL
He's very old, isn't He, Peter?

PETER
Yes. Very old. And the night is His time.

They stand, looking at each other in mute dread and awe.

DISSOLVE TO:

210 EXT. THE SKYLINE SUNDOWN 210

Dark purple shadows have turned the corn below the horizon into an almost blank, solid-looking mass. We can barely tell that this is corn. The sun has already gone behind the horizon, but the sky is still a bright gold. There is an almost other-worldly quality to the visuals.

SOUND: A BELL begins to ring steadily.

211 EXT. ABOVE THE CORN - HIGH ANGLE SUNDOWN 211

The BOYS are hurrying back out of the corn, grouping together.

The BELL continues to peal.

212 EXT. THE BELL SUNDOWN 212

A girl's hand is ringing a large BELL which juts out from a white-sided BUILDING.

WIDER — to see that this is the back lawn of the Baptist Church. It is the only lawn in town which looks green and well-tended. At the center of this lawn a number of long TABLES have been set up with chairs, place-settings, milk pitchers, etc. To the left, a number of GIRLS in gingham and linsey-woolsey are cooking over brazier fires. OTHER GIRLS carry loaded platters, pitchers, etc., to the tables, talking excitedly...and a little nervously. All of this looks like the apotheosis of the Saturnight night church supper.

The BELL continues to RING — and now the BOYS appear, looking tired and dispirited...and defeated. They slowly beat the cornsilk from their clothes as they approach the tables and SIT.

213 EXT. THE CHURCH LAWN SUNDOWN 213

MALACHAI and ISAAC come around the corner of the church. They also look tired — tired and grim. ISAAC moves toward one table with a final word for MALACHAI.

MOVING WITH MALACHAI as he stops on the way to one of the tables...glances toward CAMERA...and the bell stops ringing.

214 EXT. NEAR THE BELL 214

RUTH, the pregnant girl who is MALACHAI's woman, has been ringing the bell; her hand is still on the rope.

She looks him a question. MALACHAI shakes his head and goes on. She begins to ring the bell again.

215 EXT. IN THE CORN - BURT 215

He is sitting cross-legged in one of the rows. His right shirtsleeve is gone — he has used it to make a bandage around the knife wound. He's listening, head cocked. He gets on his knees and puts his ear to the ground. Then he sits up again, smiles.

BURT
You should have picked someone who didn't spend three years on jungle patrol, fellas. Put that in your God and smoke it.

216 EXT. THE TABLES BEHIND THE CHURCH SUNDOWN 216

All are seated now, steaming bowls of food lined up and down the tables. There is no talking. As one, they turn to MALACHAI.

MALACHAI
(sternly)
Let us pray.

217 IN THE CORN - BURT SUNDOWN 217

BURT is jogging easily along one of the rows. He stops, looking up — the first few STARS have now come out. He gazes at them in a kind of simple wonder, growing puzzled. He rubs the side of his neck.

BURT
Vicky...can you really be dead?

He sits down, puts his head on his knees, then looks up again and takes a deep breath.

BURT
Twelve years. It can't be. I cracked up, that's what happened. I cracked up when I hit that little kid. Went Section Eight. Seen it happen many times. This is all a head-trip.

He giggles and yanks a corn leaf from one of the nearby plants with his good arm. He blows the leaf and watches it float out of his hand and onto the ground.

BURT
Poof! Nothing but a head-trip.

218 EXT. THE TABLES BEHIND THE CHURCH NIGHT 218

There's still a light in the sky, but it's an afterglow. Torches have been lit around the eating area.

WITH MALACHAI at the head of one table. To his left is RUTH. To his right, a BOY we don't know. This BOY is intent only on scoffing up as much food as he can.

MALACHAI's face is harsh. He stares off into the distance, his food untouched, his mind obviously still in the corn.

RUTH touches his wrist tenderly, with love. He looks at her.

RUTH
Never mind, Malachai. If it's God's will, the Children will continue as they always have.

MALACHAI
If it's God's will, yes.

RUTH looks toward the corn.

RUTH
It's night now...

MALACHAI
Yes.

RUTH
His time.

MALACHAI
Yes.

RUTH
Then why do you fear?

MALACHAI
I fear nothing.

He begins to eat. She looks at him for a long time, troubled now herself. At last she too begins to eat.

219 IN THE CORN - BURT NIGHT 219

Still sitting, looking at the sky. More stars. There are wet streaks on his cheeks — he's been crying.

BURT
Sitting here in a row of corn in fucking Nebraska and talking to myself, it's got to be a head-trip, right?

219 (CONTINUED) 219

He strips another leaf of corn, looks at it, speaks to it.

BURT
(lecturing)
Some things can't happen, not in the nineteen-eighties. And one of them is a whole town just...going crazy. What did they do, kill everybody over the age of twenty-one? Fat fucking chance.

The expression on his face is one of thoughtful fear -- like the dawning realization we saw in the town Police Dept. office.

BURT
But suppose...just for the sake of argument...suppose they did ...kill...kill them all.

He shakes the corn leaf he's holding as if admonishing it.

BURT
I don't believe it for a minute, mind you, but just suppose. Suppose that back there in 1968 the crops were all shitty...and then the guys with the Jesus-tents showed up...and all the kids went crazy and killed their parents. What'd they do, drop LSD in the school water supply? What about the electric company? The phone company? What about all the delivery trucks from outside? The state cops, too. Not to mention the people just passing through, like you and me, Vicky. Some of those people had to notice something. A thing like this couldn't just go on for twelve fucking years.
(pause)
Could it?

He blows away the corn-leaf.

BURT
Section-fucking-eight.

A longer pause.

219 (CONT'D) 219

BURT
Unless some freaked-out God really is looking out for them. Wouldn't that be a laugh?

But no one is laughing. BURT suddenly looks very nervous. He gets to his feet.

BURT
Due west back to the highway. Right? Right. Hitch a ride. Make some phone calls.
(pauses, mutters)
And no more talking to yourself, either.

He trots down the row, then crashes through to the right and out of sight.

DISSOLVE TO:

220 THE CORN HIGH ANGLE NIGHT 220

It looks like a total blank down there — dark and ominous.

221 IN THE CORN NIGHT 221

The SOUND of BURT's breathing, fast but under control. Then BURT breaks through from the left and pauses in this row about ten feet away, getting his wind back. He looks hot and tired and mussed. His pants and shirt are matted with cornsilk and bits of green leaf. There's cornsilk in his hair.

BURT
So where's the goddam road? I should have hit it an hour ago.

He controls his breathing and puts his head back in a listening posture.

No SOUND at all — except the faint rustle of wind in corn.

A sense of impending doom, as if something is closing in.

After a moment he gets his wind back. He looks up at the sky, then raises his hands, thumbs together. In the squared-off U formed by his two hands, a single STAR glitters. He has apparently been navigating by it — another on-patrol trick.

He drops his hands in disgust.

221 (CONT'D) 221

BURT
Lost the Jesus freaks, anyway. Lost them or they went home. Probably they don't come in here at night. Too easy to get lost, right. Too fucking easy to...

He rubs his mouth, and then crosses through to the next row of corn, out of sight.

CAMERA HOLDS on the empty row. Nothing to see. Nothing to hear but BURT beating his way through the corn in a westerly direction...

The empty row is creepy, and getting creepier.

222 MONTAGE: IN THE CORN - BURT NIGHT 222

A SERIES OF SHOTS as time passes -- as BURT gets ever more tired and winded.

He's getting messier and messier -- cornsilk all over his clothes and in his hair.

When the wound on his arm breaks open, he wearily re-dresses it.

The corn actually seems to be holding him back. Hours have passed, and still he's lost....

223 A ROW IN THE CORN NIGHT 223

Nothing but the dark. Then BURT comes up, moving slowly. He stops in the middle distance and looks around with that slow, burned-out stupidity that comes from total fatigue.

BURT
(muttering)
Where's the road?
(pause)
(screaming)
Where's the fucking road?

He looks around. He speaks again, no longer talking to himself. He is speaking directly to the corn, which has become almost a living presence.

BURT
And that isn't the only thing wrong here! I got eyes! I can see! I grew up in the country, for God's sake! This is a goddam cornpatch, isn't it? A pretty damn big one, but still a cornpatch.

223 (CONT'D) 223

BURT (CONT'D)
So where's the weeds? Huh? Where's goddam weeds? There isn't one! No witchgrass, no jimson, no pikeweed, whore's hair, nothing! Huh? You ever hear of a cornpatch with no weeds? Eighth wonder of the world, right?

BURT turns wildly and rips up several corn plants and throws them. He falls to his knees and begins digging at the earth, spraying clods around. After digging for a minute he gets to his feet again with a handful of earth which he sifts through his fingers.

BURT
Something else. There's nothing wrong with this corn. How 'bout that? No caterpillar eggs. No yellowblight. No groundhogs. I haven't even seen a goddam mole-hole!
(laughs wildly)
Not even a fucking crow! Whoever heard of a cornpatch without crows? It's like apple pie without ice cream, right? Like a hotdog without a bun. Like Howard without Johnson's. Like...

He trails off, looking around nervously. We hear the SOUND of the wind RUSTLING the corn — a secret sound, suddenly very unpleasant. Again we have that feeling of things building to a nasty climax. BURT is still holding back, but barely.

BURT
But I'm going to get out of here. Dig on it awhile. I can keep going west by the stars. All fucking night, if I want. And if it clouds over—
(taps his head)
Sixty-one patrols. I came back from every one. Bet your sweet ass. I came back from some of them at night. No sweat. Cloudy nights...rainy nights...still no sweat. Because I got a compass in my head! No sweat, no fucking strain, you understand me?

Burt is practically screaming now, talking to the corn, challenging it.

SOUND: The corn RUSTLING...but only behind him.

223 (CONT'D) 223

BURT wheels around, ready to look — or fight — but there is NOTHING.

BURT
When I get out of here I'm going to blow the whistle so fucking loud—

He begins to jog away down the row.

224 IN THE CORN - BURT'S POV JUST BEFORE DAWN 224

SOUND of BURT'S FEET and his BREATHING — AMPLIFIED.

LOOKING UP at the sky — the first streaks of dawn?

SOUND: One of BURT'S FEET striking the other.

FALLING. A confused look at the corn, BURT's legs. Dirt.

225 IN THE CORN - ANGLE ON BURT JUST BEFORE DAWN 225

BURT has tumbled into a heap. He picks himself up and brushes himself off a little. Now he looks scared.

BURT
Don't panic. It'll be daylight soon.

SOUND: The CORNLEAVES RUSTLING and SHAKING. This time it doesn't stop.

BURT WHIRLS, trying to see in all directions at once.

BURT
Who's there? I hear you! Come on out where I can see you, goddammit! Come out, you black-pajama bastards! Come—

He cuts himself off, realizing what he has said, realizing that he is starting to relive the war...<u>really</u> going section eight.

BURT
I'm getting out of here.

RUNNING. At first he is only jogging again, but he hears that RUSTLING SOUND and begins to pick up. The jog becomes a steady run.

225 (CONT'D) 225

FOLLOWING BURT'S FEET. All at once a corn plant seems to reach out and twine itself around one of his calves. He thumps to the ground. He looks to see what tripped him. The plant is still twisted around his leg, torn out by the roots.

BURT
Jesus!

He struggles to pull lose, finally does, and gets to his feet. He backs away from the dismembered cornplant in the center of the row...and right into the row behind him.

SOUND: Low, insistent RUSTLING.

The corn seems to be clutching at him. BURT has to struggle to pull free. When he does, he turns around to look — and nearly backs into the other row.

He moves to the middle of the row and looks around. Wipes his mouth.

BURT
It's narrower. The row...it's narrower. It is, I swear it!

He begins to run again.

226 IN THE CORN - BURT'S POV 226

RUNNING — running fast! We see the row ahead, still straight as a string...but narrower now, much narrower!

227 ANGLE ON BURT 227

There's quite a bit more light now. BURT is not jogging or running — he is SPRINTING, terrified. The row of corn has NARROWED so much that the overhanging leaves brush and slap at his shoulders.

A cornplant whips out and slaps Burt's cheek — leaving a thin streak of BLOOD.

The row narrows even further in a claustrophobe's nightmare. Now there is barely enough room to pass. The blood trickles down Burt's cheek. The SOUND of his BREATHING is rapid and fading. He is nearly winded.

Cornsilk flutters from his hair like pennons.

228 IN THE CORN - BURT'S POV 228

RUNNING — still looking straight down the row...except that now there isn't much row left. The corn overhangs and nearly chokes it off. The effect is very jungly, very spooky.

SOUND of creaking, breaking cornplants as BURT forces a passage. His BREATHING is more like sobbing now.

LEAVES slap out, blocking the view — we are looking through a forest of cornleaves. BURT's hands push on through the corn.

229 ANGLE ON BURT'S LEGS 229

The corn wraps around them and he yanks loose with effort.

WIDER to see that Burt has stopped, totally winded. No row left at all. He is in a jungle of corn. His face and hands are bleeding from scratches. He is nearly bug-eyed with fear.

SOUND: The RUSTLING.

FOLLOWING as he turns around and with great effort forces his way back the way he came.

After ten or twenty yards he stops, breathing hard, staring around wildly.

BURT
(a croak)
Where's the row? Where's the goddam row?

He tries to jump high enough to see over the corn, but can't. He starts to move again...and stops. He turns to look behind.

SOUND of SOMETHING COMING — or is it the sound of corn swishing?

BURT
Who's there?

Stark terror on Burt's face. He rubs at his mouth.

BURT
(shrieks)
Who is it?

The SOUND — RUSTLING or SOMETHING ELSE — is coming inexorably through the corn. Coming for Burt.

229 (CONT'D) 229

BURT is frozen with terror. He breaks out of it suddenly —

FOLLOWING as he beats his way through the corn, looking back over his shoulder in horror. Finally he turns. Looks. Sees something.
POV BURT
A DARK SHADOW seems to fall over BURT and the surrounding corn. He looks up — up — UP. And begins to scream.

He is SCREAMING, his hands to his face. He falls backward. His hands come up in a warding-off gesture.

The DARKNESS enfolds him as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

230 THE CORN - HIGH ANGLE MIDDAY 230

The corn sparkles, green and fresh, pastorally innocent. The SOUND of singing birds.

231 IN THE CLEARING 231

All the CHILDREN — boys and girls — are gathered here. They are looking solemnly at something. In the group we see MALACHAI, ISAAC, PETER, DANIEL, RUTH. The BOY Burt kicked in the balls is also here, looking mildly sick.

ISAAC steps forward and addresses them.

ISAAC
Behold, a dream came to me in the night, and the Lord did shew all this to me.

There is an apprehensive MURMUR from the others.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
In my dream He Who Walks Behind the Rows did come to me, and he spoke to me as he spoke to our older brothers and sisters many years ago, even when the oldest among us were only little children. He is much displeased with this sacrifice.

They make a SIGHING noise.

232 IN THE CLEARING - NEW ANGLE 232

LOOKING DOWN at the CHILDREN from the other side of the clearing. In the extreme FOREGROUND we see the Blue Man. Below him, back to camera, ISAAC addresses his congregation.

ISAAC
And the Lord did say: Have I not given you this place of killing, that you might make sacrifice here? And have I not shewn you favor? But this man, this interloper, was strong in his evil and did cause confusion among you, so that I have completed this sacrifice myself.

OTHERS
(sighing)
Yes...yes...

PANNING RIGHT as ISAAC speaks to see VICKY, crucified with baling wire. Beyond her, similarly done up, is JOSEPH, the BOY. Cornhusks and corncob crucifixes have been piled up around them, and a crucifix dangles from the neck of each.

There is a THIRD CROSS — EMPTY.

ISAAC
In the olden days the Age of Favor was reduced from nineteen plantings and harvestings to eighteen. So now on this day, because of what has happened, it is lowered to seventeen. Each and every one of you will walk into the corn at dusk upon your seventeenth birthday. And He Who *Walks Behind the Rows will find you.* And you will walk with him. So the Lord told me.

Numb silence greets this.

Standing next to MALACHAI is RUTH, very pregnant. She begins to sob and hold to Malachai. After a moment MALACHAI thrusts her away.

MALACHAI
(*firmly*)
Praise God.

OTHERS
(after a pause)
Praise God.

232 (CONT'D) 232

ISAAC
Yet be fruitful and multiply
this day as the corn multiplies,
that the favor of He Who Walks
Behind the Rows may be shewn you,
and be upon you. Amen.

OTHERS
Amen.

There is a pause, a soft murmuring. Then the group turns and begins to leave, walking through the corn. Some of them smile and pair off into couples. MALACHAI walks supporting RUTH. ISAAC remains, standing at the edge of the clearing.

When the others have gone, he goes to the crucified bodies and looks at them one by one. He smirks at the body of VICKY, wired to a cross made out of fencepoles. Her face is drawn in an expression of extreme terror. Her eyes have been ripped out, and the sockets stuffed with cornsilk.

ISAAC goes to the Blue Man. He picks up the hat which has fallen from its grinning skull and balances it back in place on the head. The cap still holds a badge clipped to it which says CHIEF OF POLICE.

There is an expression of utter contempt on ISAAC's face.

ISAAC
Scarecrows!

He turns and walks away, leaving the clearing deserted.

MOVING IN ON THE BLUE MAN'S SKULL — grinning in closeup.

DISSOLVE TO:

233 EXT. THE VACANT LOT DUSK 233

The end of a beautiful summer's day. Couples drift into the lot, smiling sweetly. The tables are set again with steaming food. Some of the girls are weaving and quilting in a group. Others prepare the food and make ready. One couple can be seen rolling together in the grass.

MALACHAI arrives. RUTH is with him. She is not crying, but it is obvious that she has been.

RUTH
Please, Malachai—

233 (CONT'D) 233

MALACHAI
I obey the will of God. My birthday would have come in September, the time of the next harvest, and I am only losing two months. Amos is losing almost all of his eighteenth year.

RUTH
If this is the will of God, I wish there were no God!

MALACHAI
(shocked)
Don't blaspheme!

She is silent. MALACHAI raises her chin and gives her a light kiss.

MALACHAI
Have a fine son, Ruth. Raise him to love He Who Walks Behind the Rows and to hate the world.

She turns away from him, crying.

MALACHAI
(sternly)
Promise me!

RUTH
I...I...I...

ISAAC stands watching. He leads AMOS over.

ISAAC
It's time.

AMOS
Yes, it's time.

MALACHAI
I know.

Others who have come to see them off gather around MALACHAI and AMOS. There are maybe a dozen of these "old" children, girls and boys. The girls gather around RUTH.

MALACHAI and AMOS, under ISAAC's watchful eye, prepare to go. They take out small vials -- poison -- and swallow the contents.

Then they walk into the corn.

233 (CONT'D 233

The children left behind link hands and begin the HUMMING.

234 MALACHAI AND AMOS - IN THE CORN - MOVING 234

They move deeper into the rows.

AMOS stays close to MALACHAI, who is walking confidently.

AMOS
I'm afraid, Malachai.

MALACHAI
Be not afraid, Amos.

MALACHAI smiles.

SOUND: A RUSTLING in the corn.

The sky is awash with a blood-red sunset, tinting the tops of the plants.

MALACHAI
Here, hold to my arm. I am with you, Amos, just as He will be with you soon....

AMOS
MALACHAI—!

AMOS falters, staggers, clutches Malachai's arm — and falls. The poison has taken effect.

MALACHAI
You will be with him in paradise this very day.

Then MALACHAI laughs strangely. He stands over the body. Amos' hand is uncurled, holding the empty poison bottle. MALACHAI reaches into his clothing and takes out his bottle. He pours the still-full contents into the ground near AMOS.

MALACHAI laughs. He holds his arms up and out to receive the glorious warmth of the sunset.

Exits frame.

A RUSTLING in the CORN --

235 THE CORN 235

A SHADOW, tall against the dying sun.

CUT TO:

236 IN THE VACANT LOT - THE CHILDREN 236

ISAAC is gathering the others around him, preparing to leave.

ISAAC

Come, brothers and sisters,
it is late.

We hear a SCREAM from the CORN.

DANIEL
What was that scream?

GIRL
Silly, that was only Rachel.
Can't you see her, Daniel?
She's there with Ezra.
(giggles)

DANIEL
No, I don't mean that. There
was another sound. From the
corn.

ANOTHER BOY
He speaks true, Isaac. I heard
it, too. Do you think--

ISAAC
Yes. You are right. I heard
it well. It was as you believe.
It was He Who Walks Behind the
Rows.

CUT TO:

237 DIRECTLY OVERHEAD SHOT OF BURT 237

BURT is standing over MALACHAI lying dead at his feet. It *is as if BURT has assumed the role of He Who Walks Behind the Rows. He is filthy, blood-stained, grizzled and insane-*looking from his ordeal. Hold for a beat.
(We may not be sure if it's actually BURT.)

We pull back to further reveal a well worn figure eight path in the corn that BURT has travelled in his panicked attempt to escape. Hold for a beat.
(We know it to be BURT.)

237 (CONT'D)

We further pull up and hold to reveal, 20 yards from where BURT is standing, the road that he never reached.

Our helicopter shot keeps going. We see the nearby roads, the fields, nearby towns, the interstate...in other words, all of rural Nebraska.

CREDITS roll as we fly over the countryside.

THE END